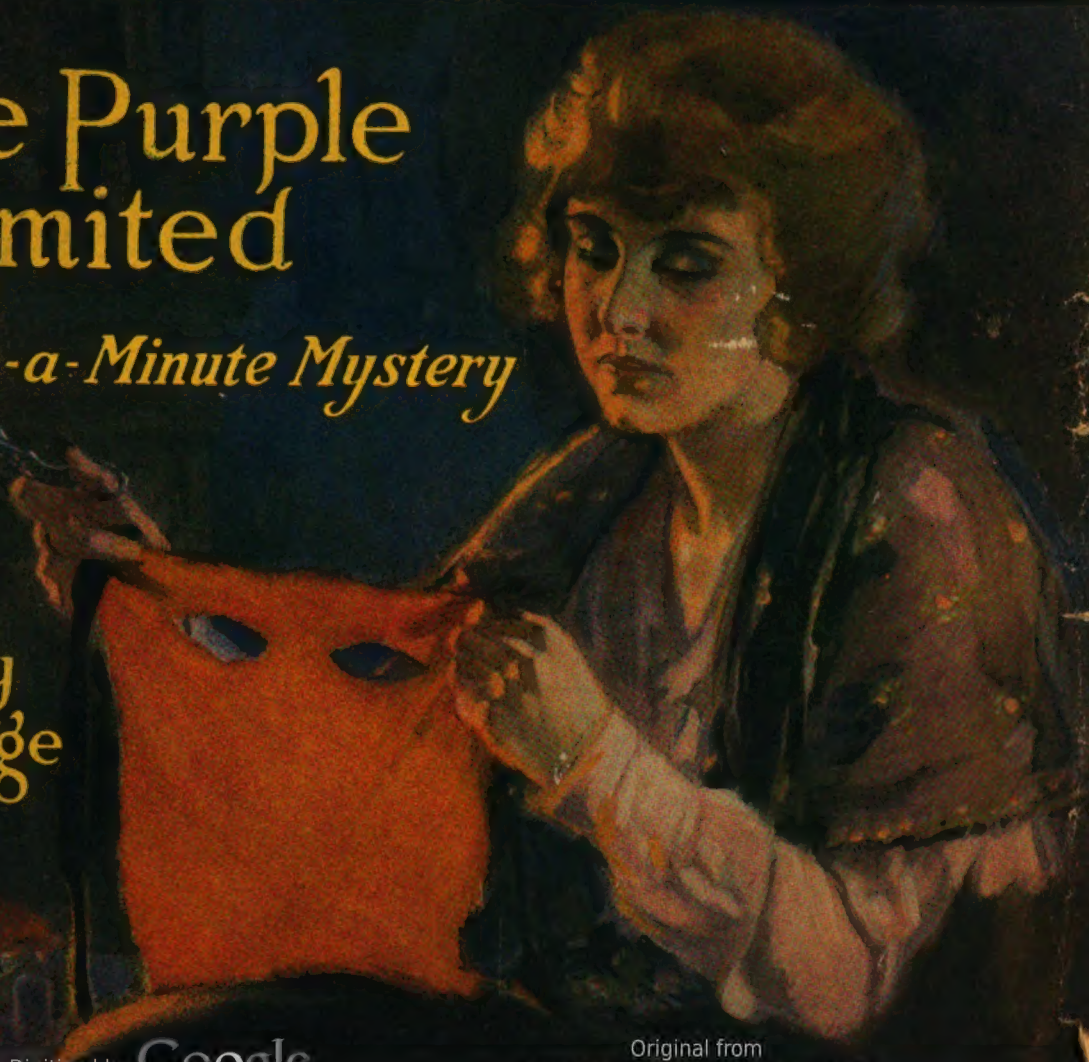


# ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

## The Purple Limited

*A Mile-a-Minute Mystery*

by  
Henry  
Leverage





# \$100 Brings These Shoes

**Prepaid on Approval**

There is no catch or string to this offer. Merely mention this paper and send \$1.00 with order. The shoes come to you immediately on approval, express prepaid. If satisfied, pay \$1.00 monthly.

## Black or Brown Atlas Kid Military or French Heel

The high lace style shown here is a favorite mode for fall and winter wear. Made in a superb quality Atlas kid leather, with glossy, glove-like, smooth finish. It stays soft and flexible and is just the proper weight. It will not spread or run over. Either style is 9 inches high, with the latest Napoleon wave top, stunning perforation at toe, vamp, lace row and around top. Swagger military heel for the walking shoe, or the graceful Louis heel in the dress shoe.

Two colors: A beautiful autumn shade brown or a rich dull black. State choice. Sizes: 2½ to 8. Widths: C, D and E.

**6 Months to Pay 9-inch High**

**Dress Boot, with Louis Heel**

High arch and Louis heel. Tipped with aluminum plate. Medium weight, close-edged sole. Long vamp, sensible pointed. State size and width. No. K5T202. Brown Atlas Kid Leather, price prepaid. **\$7.49**

No. K5T203. Black Atlas Kid Leather price prepaid **\$7.45**

**6 Months to Pay 9-inch High**

**Walking Boot, Military Heel**

Wonderfully comfortable and good looking. Medium long pointed toe. Medium close-edged sole. Aluminum plate. State size and width. No. K5T204. Brown Atlas Kid Leather, price prepaid. **\$7.49**

No. K5T205. Black Atlas Kid Leather, price prepaid **\$7.45**

## 1001 Other Styles In My Newest FREE Book

I show these shoes here simply to acquaint you with my styles and values. Especially I want to give you an example of the splendid convenience of credit. Just as I gladly send these shoes prepaid on approval, practically on your word alone, so I ship anything you order from my Style Book. There I show a whole department of beautiful new styles in handsome footwear. Altogether I display 1001 perfectly exquisite new fashions. They are the cream of all creations in women's, boys', girls' or children's clothes.

### Supreme Style and Values Coupled With Long Credit

I consider my latest book my very greatest effort. In my selection of 1001 beautiful styles I had more designs to pick from than ever before. I have created through my own designers many styles that already bid fair to become popular favorites. I am sure that no matter where you go or what beautiful clothes you may see you will find no good style that is missing from my book. When you see anything that pleases your fancy—let me send it without obligation prepaid on approval. Begin to wear it at once and pay later—as you please

### I Show Below a Small List of Departments:

Aprons	Caps	Corset Waists	Hosiery	Shirts
Baby Needs	Chemise	Underwear	Kimono	Slippers
Children's Clothes	Costeas	Dresses	Millinery	Stockings
Bath Robes	Coats	Furs	Muffs	Suits
Bloomers	Combinations	Gloves	Lingerie	Sweater
Brassieres	Corset Covers	Hair Goods	Petticoats	Vests
Capes	Corsets	Hats	Shoes	Waists

—and a Brand New Department for the Boys.



**Half Year to Pay**

## Everything a Woman Wears Sent Prepaid on Approval Wear the Pretty New Styles Early—Paying Little by Little

Don't just think of my Style Book as a place to buy a suit or coat or a pair of shoes. Consider all the other things that you are constantly buying both for yourself and the children.

No matter how little money you may plan to spend this season on clothes you cannot very well get along without the very necessary, everyday things that in the long run, bought piecemeal, run into considerable sums.

### I Prepay Delivery Charges

Such things can be purchased more satisfactorily all at one time, paying later little by little. Sent on approval, you have every opportunity to judge value, becomingness, fit and workmanship, and to be

perfectly sure you are absolutely satisfied with even the smallest purchase.

When I send my book I also open your charge account without your ever asking me. There is no need to ask for credit. That is all taken care of in advance.

### Prices Cease to Worry Mine Remain Fixed

There are many reasons for my exceptional values. Chief among these is my ability through enormous buying power to secure lowest costs direct from mills and makers. I never buy things through wholesalers or jobbers, and I have no salesmen or expensive stores.

I plan months ahead and buy accordingly. Practically all my materials were

bought as long ago as six months or more. These old costs are far lower than today's market. Not a single price in my Style Book will be raised during the entire season.

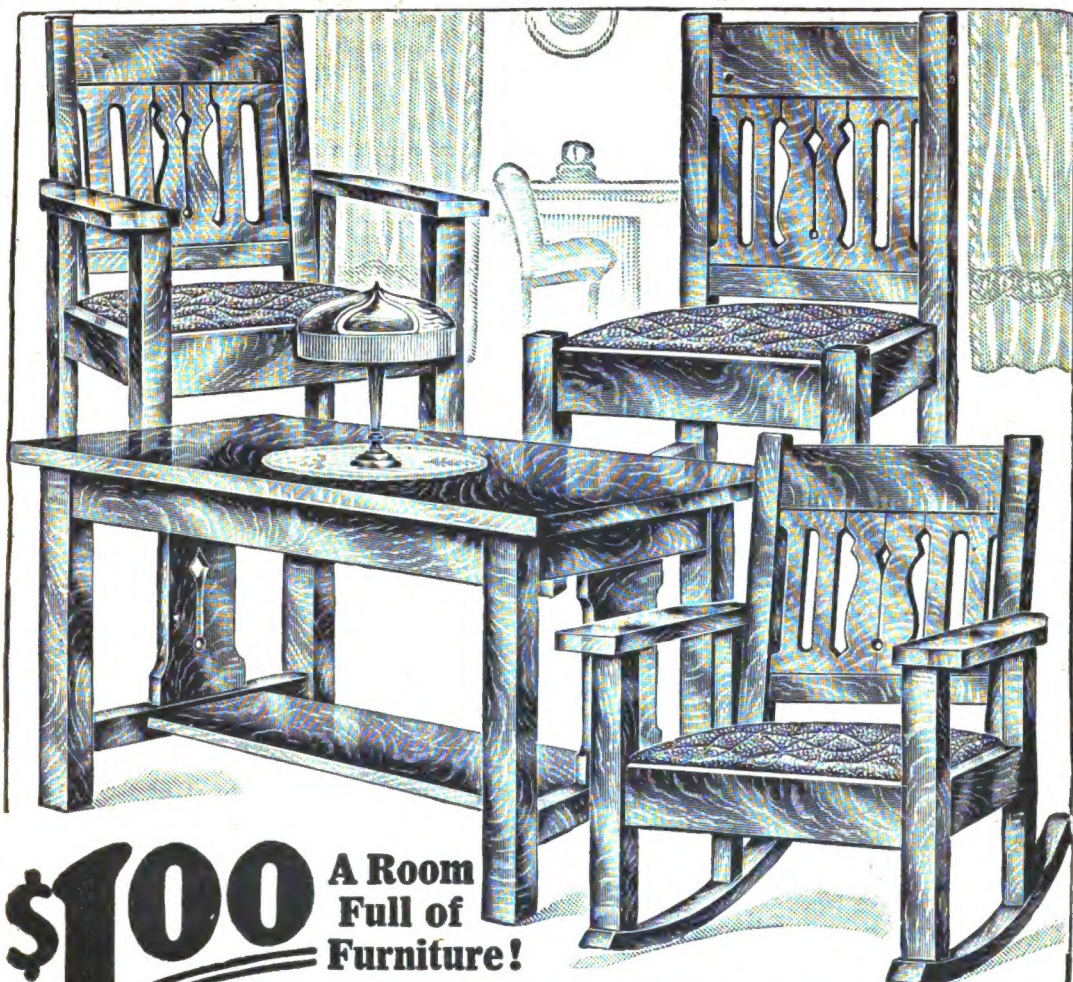
### So Mail Postal Today—Get My Book Early

I never urge my customers to buy hurriedly. I much prefer that they shop around everywhere as long as they don't neglect to have my book handy for comparison. Buying quickly from just looking at a single item is poor policy, very likely to result in bitter disappointment.

Send for my Style Book and also all others. Compare values with mine. See if anyone shows more or better styles. One thing, however, does not admit of comparison—that is my credit. There is nothing like it anywhere.

**MARATHA LANE ADAMS, 3865 Mosprat Street, Chicago**





**\$100** A Room Full of Furniture!  
Down

Send only \$1.00 and we will ship you this handsome 4-piece library set. Only \$1.00 down and then \$3.00 per month, \$34.95 in all. A staggering value. Clip the coupon below and have the set shipped on approval. See for yourself what a beautiful set it is. If you do not like it, return it in 30 days and we will return your money. This magnificent library set is not shown in our regular catalog. The value is so wonderful and the demand so great that there aren't enough to go around. So send today, sure.

**Fumed Solid Oak Set** This superb 4-piece library set is made of selected solid oak throughout, finished in rich, dull waxed brown fumed oak. Large arm rocker and arm chair are 36 inches high, seats 19 x 19 inches. Sewing rocker is 35 inches high, seat 17 x 17 inches. All 3 pieces padded. Seats upholstered in brown imitation Spanish leather. Library table has 24 x 34 inch top, with roomy magazine shelf below, and beautifully designed ends. Shipped knocked down to reduce your freight charges considerably. Easy to set up. Shipping weight, about 150 pounds. Pieces not sold separately. Order by No. B6144A. Send \$1.00 with order, \$3.00 monthly. Price \$34.95. No discount for cash. No C. O. D.

### Easy Payments!

We trust honest people anywhere in the U. S. One price to all, cash or credit. No discount for cash. Not one penny extra for credit. Positively no discount from these sensational prices—and no C. O. D.

### Thirty Days' Trial

Our money-back guarantee of complete satisfaction protects you. See the coupon.

### Free Bargain Catalog

Shows thousands of bargains in furniture, jewelry, carpets, rugs, curtains, silverware, phonographs, gloves, porch and lawn furniture, women's, men's and children's wearing apparel.

**STRAUS & SCHRAM, Dept. C527 West 35th St., Chicago**

## Send Coupon

along with \$1.00 to us now. Have this fine library set shipped on 30 days' trial. We will also send our big Bargain Catalog listing thousands of amazing bargains. Only a small first payment and balance in monthly payments for anything you want.

**Act Now, While This Special Offer Lasts**

**STRAUS & SCHRAM**  
Dept. C527, W. 35th St., Chicago

Enclosed find \$1.00. Ship special advertised 4-piece Fumed Oak Library Suite. I am to have 30 days' free trial. If I keep the suite, I will pay you \$3.00 monthly. If not satisfied, I am to return suite within 30 days and you are to refund my money and any freight charges I paid.  
☐ 4-Piece Library Set, B6144A, \$34.95

Name.....

St., R.F.D. or Box No.....

Shipping Point.....

Post Office..... State.....

If you ONLY want catalog put X in proper box below.  
☐ Furniture, Stoves and Jewelry. ☐ Clothing.

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.

# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

VOL. CXXIV

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Five Big  
Serials

### SHORT STORIES

By Henry P. Holt, Anice Terhune,  
James W. Egan, and  
Others

## THE ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY FOR SEPTEMBER 4, 1920

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

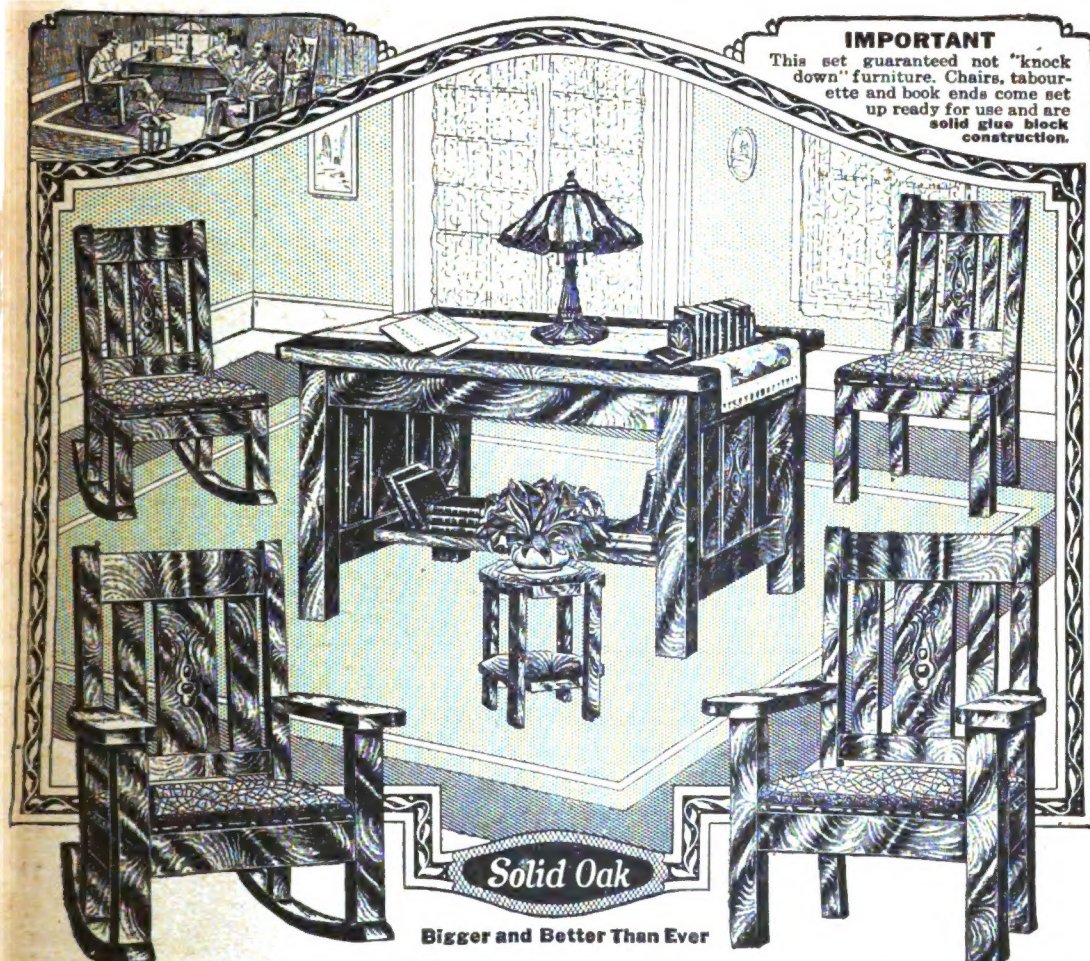
CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$6.00 to Canada, and \$7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY. COPYRIGHT, 1920

Entered as second class matter July 15, 1920, at the Post-Office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879.





## Brings the New Hartman 7-Piece Solid Construction Living Room Suite

If you don't find this splendid suite just what you want, return it and we will refund the \$1 and pay freight both ways. If you keep it, pay balance, only

**Full Year to Pay**

\$3 monthly—a whole year to pay.

Complete suite consists of large arm rocker, large arm chair, library table, sewing rocker, desk or side chair, tabourette and book ends. Genuine Mission, rich brown finish showing the beauty of the grain of the wood.

**Solid Oak**

Ornamented with richly embossed carved design on panels of chairs, rockers and table, giving a wonderfully pleasing effect. The

chair and rocker seats are constructed in a strong, durable manner and upholstered in imitation Spanish brown leather. Most comfortable, lasting and beautiful. Large arm chair and large rocker stand 36 in. high over all from floor, are 25½ in. wide over all and have seats 21x18 inches. Other rocker and chair about 12 in. wide, 17 in. high. Book ends right size and weigh: for large books. Shipped from factory in central Indiana or western N.Y. state. Shipping weight about 140 lbs.

have seats 17x16½ in. Handsome table is 24x36 in. and tabourette has octagon-shaped top. Order by No. 110BBMA8. Price \$38.85. Pay \$1 down. Balance \$3 monthly.

**FREE Bargain Catalog**

432 pages—mail us a postal for this great book—it will save you many dollars. Filled from cover to cover with stunning bargains in furniture, rugs, linoleum, stoves, ranges, watches, silvers. Hundreds of articles to select from—30 days' trial. This wonderful bargain catalog FREE. Don't buy until you get your copy. Post card or letter brings it to you.

**HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.**

3913 Wentworth Ave. Dept. 2730 Chicago

Copyrighted 1920 by Hartman's, Chicago



**HARTMAN FURNITURE & CARPET CO.**  
3913 Wentworth Ave. Dept. 2730 Chicago

Enclosed find \$1. Send the 7-Piece Living Room Suite No. 110BBMA8 as described. Guaranteed not "knock down." I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied will ship it back and you will refund my \$1 and pay freight both ways. If I keep it I will pay \$3.00 per month until the price \$38.85 is paid.

Name.....

Address.....

City..... State.....

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.



# CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING DEPARTMENT

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**Extraordinary Opportunity** is offered ambitious men to become distributors for new product now being marketed. No competition; demand everywhere. Valuable exclusive rights free. Complete sales helps and full co-operation assures success. Start small and grow. \$1000 automobile free. Opportunity to establish large business netting \$10,000 yearly. Act immediately. Garfield Mfg. Co., Dept. A, Garfield Bldg., Brooklyn, N. Y.

**YOUNG MAN, WOULD YOU ACCEPT A TAILOR-MADE SUIT** just for showing it to your friends? Then write Banner Tailoring Co., Dept. 400, Chicago, and get beautiful samples, styles and a wonderful offer.

**BIGGEST MONEY-MAKER IN AMERICA.** I want 100 men and women quick to take orders for raincoats, raincoats and waterproof aprons. Thousands of orders waiting for you. \$2.00 an hour for spare time. McDonough made \$813.00 in one month; Nissen \$19.00 in three hours; Purviance \$207.00 in seven days. \$5,000 a year profit for eight average orders a day. No delivering or collecting. Beautiful coat free. No experience or capital required. Write quick for information. Comer Mfg. Co., Dept. Y128, Dayton, Ohio.

**SALESMEN—CITY OR TRAVELING.** Experience unnecessary. Send for list of lines and full particulars. Prepare in spare time to earn the big salaries—\$2,500 to \$10,000 a year. Employment services rendered Members. National Salesmen's Training Association, Dept. 133-K, Chicago, Ill.

**INSYDIATRES—Inner Armor For Auto Tires.** Doubles mileage, prevents 90% of all punctures and blowouts. Thousands in use. Tremendous demand. Big sales. Liberal profits. Details free. American Automobile Accessories Co., Dept. 165, Cincinnati, O.

**SELL What Millions Want.** New, wonderful Liberty Portraits. Creates tremendous interest. Absolutely different; unique; enormous demand—30 hours' service. Liberal credit. Outfit and catalogue free. \$100 weekly profit easy. Consolidated Portrait Co., Dept. 22, 1036 W. Adams Street, Chicago.

**\$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc.,** absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

**\$65.00 A WEEK AND YOUR SUIT FREE—IF YOU TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR STARTLING OFFER.** Write us at once and we will send you a full line of samples and everything necessary to start at once, absolutely free, postage prepaid. Spencer Mead Company, Dept. 1195, Chicago.

**SEND 2c. POSTAGE** for free sample with particulars. No splashing water strainers. Easy seller. Returns big. Experience unnecessary. Seed Filter Co., N 73 Franklin St., New York.

**AGENTS: SOMETHING NEW. WIRELESS GUARANTEED UMBRELLAS.** Adjust new top in minute. Handles collapse to fit suitcase. Other features. Popular prices. Free sample. Parker Mfg. Co., 506 Dike Street, Dayton, Ohio.

**DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN** to sell your merchandise? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 5,000,000 readers of The Munsey Magazines. Our Classified Service Bureau will gladly show you how to use this section most profitably and at the least cost. Write to-day to the Classified Manager, The Argosy-Allstory, 280 Broadway, N. Y.

## SALESMEN WANTED

**BIG MONEY FOR SALESMEN. BUILD YOUR OWN BUSINESS SELLING OUR HIGH GRADE GROCERIES** to your neighbors and others. Our quality goods and wholesale prices get orders and repeat orders. Beginners average \$8 a day profit. No investment required. Wonderful chance for money and independence. Our book "Opportunity" tells all about it. Write for it—today. National Wholesale Grocers, Dept. 8, 112-118 N. May Street, Chicago.

## MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

**FARMSEEKERS ATTENTION!** Use your credit with us and buy a farm home. 10 to 160 acres of hardwood land in Kalamazoo and Antrim counties, Michigan. \$15 to \$35 per acre. Small down payments, easy monthly terms. Close to schools, churches, markets, railroads, towns and neighbors. No swamps or stumps. Raise fruit, grain, poultry or stock. Settlers tax-free for five years. Warranty Deed and Abstract of Title with every purchase. Write for free booklet. Swigart Land Co., Y1245 First Nat'l Bank Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

## MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

**PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS.** No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Walnwright, St. Louis, Mo.

## AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

**AMBITIOUS? We will establish you in business; manufacture articles wanted everywhere, under your name, for \$50 each (retailing \$1.50); show you how to reach consumers, dealers, agents, personally and by mail; furnish everything, and advertise for you free. Tremendous repeat business. Kaley Scientific Laboratories, 21 Court Street, Brooklyn, N. Y.**

**SALESMEN—Side or Main Line—to sell low priced 6,000 mile guaranteed tires; 30x3 1/2 non-skid sells for \$13.95; other sizes in proportion. Good money making proposition for live wires. Master Tire Co., 1414 So. Michigan, Chicago.**

**WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, furnishing everything.** Men and women, \$30.00 to \$100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. Ragdale Co., Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

**House-to-House Canvassers** wanted for best all-around Cleanser on the market: a cleanser of merit, guaranteed to give satisfaction. Proposition worth investigating. Write for particulars today. DeLine Mfg. Co., 24 Pope Bldg., Louisville, Ky.

**LARGE MANUFACTURER WANTS AGENTS** to sell Guaranteed Made-to-Measure Raincoats, \$30-\$75 weekly. Highest commission. Profit in advance. Outfit free. Standard Raincoat Co., Dept. A, 163 W. 21st St., New York.

**Mexican Diamonds Flash Like Genuine, fool experts, stand tests, yet sell for 1-50th the price.** Few live Agents wanted to sell from handsome sample case. Big profits, pleasant work. Write today. Mexican Diamond Imp'tg. Co., Box 88, Las Cruces, N. Mexico.

**AGENTS: Reversible Raincoat.** Two coats for the price of one. Something brand new. Not sold in stores. Latest style. Every man wants one. Binford sold 25 coats in five days. Write quick for sample and territory. Be first to introduce this big new seller. Thomas Raincoat Co., 1607 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

**DAVIS' LUCKY LEVEN SELLING BETTER THAN EVER.** \$3.35 value sells for \$1.25. Mrs. Lewis sold 280 in 7 1/2 days—profit \$200. "37" varieties of other big winners—150%-250% profit. Great crew managers' proposition. E. M. Davis, Dept. 58, Chicago.

**AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan** is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

**AGENTS—With experience,** to sell our famous \$29.00 and \$35.50 made-to-measure suits and overcoats; big money-maker. Big selling outfits furnished free. Midland Tailors, Dept. 1, 318 W. Washington St., Chicago, Ill.

**AGENTS—LARGE MANUFACTURER WANTS AGENTS** to sell hosiery, underwear, shirts, dresses, skirts, waists, shoes, clothing, etc. Write for free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

**AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. SELL MENDETS,** a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

**AGENTS—Your own clothes free and \$60 a week.** Start in your spare time. Tailoring business simply great this year. Write American Woolen Mills Company, Dept. 1433, Chicago, for cloth samples of 60 big sensational sellers.

## HELP WANTED

**WANTED EVERYWHERE—Men** to become Fingerprint and Identification Experts; big demand, fascinating work. We teach you how. Address Dept. A, for facts. Federal Fingerprint Institute, Kansas City, Mo.

**WE WILL START YOU** in the cleaning and dyeing business; little capital needed, big profits. Write for booklet. The Ben-Vonde System, Dept. F, Charlotte, N. C.

**WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES** for pay in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

**RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTORS EARN FROM \$110 TO \$200 PER MONTH** and expenses. Travel if desired. Unlimited advancement. No age limit. We train you. Positions furnished under guarantee. Write for Booklet CM 50. Standard Business Training Institute, Buffalo, N. Y.

**LADIES TO SEW AT HOME FOR A LARGE PHILADELPHIA FIRM** Good pay; nice work; no canvassing. Send stamped envelope for prices paid. Universal Co., Dept. 20, Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

**DO YOU want to earn \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year?** You can do it easily. See Anderson Steam Vulcanizer Display Ad in this issue.

**DETECTIVES EARN BIG MONEY.** Excellent opportunities for travel. Great demand everywhere. Fascinating work. Experience unnecessary. We train you. Particulars free. Write, American Detective System, 1968 Broadway, New York.

**FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, \$140-\$200.** Colored Porters, by railroads everywhere. Experience unnecessary. 836 Railway Bureau, East St. Louis, Ill.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.





## "The proudest moment of our lives had come!"

"We sat before the fireplace, Mary and I, with Betty perched on the arm of the big chair. It was our first evening in our own home! There were two glistening tears in Mary's eyes, yet a smile was on her lips. I knew what she was thinking.

"Five years before we had started bravely out together. The first month had taught us the old, old lesson that two cannot live as cheaply as one. I had left school in the grades to go to work and my all too thin pay envelope was a weekly reminder of my lack of training. In a year Betty came—three mouths to feed now. Meanwhile living costs were soaring. Only my salary and I were standing still.

"Then one night Mary came to me. 'Jim,' she said, 'Why don't you go to school again—right here at home? You can put in an hour or two after supper each night while I sew. Learn to do some one thing. You'll make good—I know you will.'

"Well, we talked it over and that very night I wrote to Scranton. A few days later I had taken up a course in the work I was in. It was surprising how rapidly the mysteries of our business became clear to me—took on a new fascination. In a little while an opening came. I was ready for it and was promoted—with an increase. Then I was advanced again. There was money enough to even lay a little aside. So it went.

"And now the fondest dream of all has come true. We have a real home of our own with the little comforts and luxuries Mary had always longed for, a little place, as she says, that 'Betty can be proud to grow up in.'

"I look back now in pity at those first blind stumbling years. Each evening after supper the doors of opportunity had swung wide and I had passed them by. How grateful I am that Mary helped me to see that night the golden hours that lay within."

In city, town and country all over America there are men with happy families and prosperous homes because they let the International Correspondence Schools come to them in the hours after supper and prepare them for bigger work at better pay. More than two million men and women in the last 29 years have advanced themselves through spare time study with the I. C. S. Over one hundred thousand right now are turning their evenings to profit. Hundreds are starting every day.

You, too, can have the position you want in the work you like best. You can have a salary that will give your family the kind of a home, the comforts, the little luxuries that you would like them to have. Yes, you can! No matter what your age, your occupation, or your means—you can do it!

All we ask is the chance to prove it. That's fair, isn't it? Then mark and mail this coupon. There's no obligation and not a penny of cost. But it may be the most important step you ever took in your life.

### INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS BOX 2162-B, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Lighting and Railways | <input type="checkbox"/> ADVERTISING             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Electric Wiring                | <input type="checkbox"/> Window Trimmer          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineer             | <input type="checkbox"/> Show Card Writer        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Telephone Work                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Sign Painter            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MECHANICAL ENGINEER            | <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Trainman       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Draftsman           | <input type="checkbox"/> ILLUSTRATING            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Machine Shop Practice          | <input type="checkbox"/> Cartooning              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Toolmaker                      | <input type="checkbox"/> BUSINESS MANAGEMENT     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engine Operating           | <input type="checkbox"/> Private Secretary       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> CIVIL ENGINEER                 | <input type="checkbox"/> BOOKKEEPER              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping          | <input type="checkbox"/> Stenographer and Typist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER       | <input type="checkbox"/> Cert. Public Accountant |
| <input type="checkbox"/> STATIONARY ENGINEER            | <input type="checkbox"/> TRAFFIC MANAGER         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engineer                | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Accountant      |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECT                      | <input type="checkbox"/> GOOD ENGLISH            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contractor and Builder         | <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Draftsman        | <input type="checkbox"/> Common School Subjects  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Concrete Builder               | <input type="checkbox"/> CIVIL SERVICE           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Engineer            | <input type="checkbox"/> Railway Mail Clerk      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> PLUMBING AND HEATING           | <input type="checkbox"/> AUTOMOBILE OPERATING    |
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|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish                 |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> French                  |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> Italian                 |

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
 Present \_\_\_\_\_  
 Occupation \_\_\_\_\_  
 Street \_\_\_\_\_  
 and No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Canadians may send this coupon to 7-25-'19  
 International Correspondence Schools, Montreal, Canada

In answering this advertisement it is desirable that you mention this magazine.





Here's the new "Big City" Style Book—the only Book of its kind in America—showing large assortment of actual Cloth Samples and all the latest styles in Men's Made-to-Measure Clothes together with a complete assortment of Shirts, Ties, Hats, Shoes, Collars, Sox, Sweaters, Jerseys, etc., etc. This Book shows you how to get everything you wear direct from the manufacturer at inside wholesale prices. If you want to dress well and save money, get a copy of this Book—**TODAY**. Yours FREE for the asking. Address Dep't. B-13.

**WRIGHT & COMPANY**  
Congress, Throsp & Harrison - CHICAGO

## This All Wool Suit Made to Your \$25.00 Measure Only

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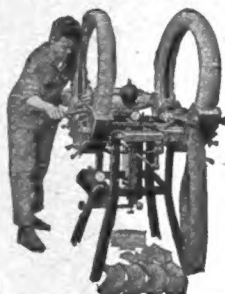
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# ARGOSY-ALLSTORY W E E K L Y

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## *The Purple Limited* by Henry Leverage

### CHAPTER I.

#### THIRTY MINUTES LATE.

**I**T began with lights — green lights, red lights, white lights where the sputtering carbons arced behind the snow on the locos' headlamps.

Grotesque and camel-backed, the locos formed a half-moon by the roundhouse, where ashes, glow'd and lanterns moved back and forth, up and down.

One lantern separated from the others and came through the night mist and snow. It disappeared between two rows of gondola cars. It reappeared. It stopped, and went on a car's length. Again it stopped, while the checker placed a number on a long slip of damp paper.

The checker's cap was drawn over his eyes. His shoulders were hunched. He carried the lantern hooked on his left arm. He was one of seven thousand men on the pay-roll of the C. M. and Western. The local boss of the C. M. and W. was J. J. Darrah, known as "J.J.D." He was the checker's friend in more ways than one.

The last gondola car in the line was even with a street crossing at the lower end of

the yard. The checker stepped from behind this car, folded the slip of paper, swung the lantern at his knees, and slushed through the snow to an all-night lunch-wagon.

He stamped his feet on a glistening triangle of slate, pushed open the lunch-wagon's door, and perched on a stool before a counter heaped high with egg-sandwiches, heavy mugs, and a "sand-box" filled with sugar.

"Cup o' coffee and piece o' apple pie," he said to a white-aproned clerk.

The clerk turned and opened the spigot of a tarnished cylinder out of which a liquid flowed. Deftly he sliced the pie—slid a mug and a plate across the counter, following them with a spoon and a fork.

The checker started eating the pie. A passing freight shook the lunch-wagon. The door opened to a crack, and then wide. A freckled-faced girl came in. There was no single regularity to her features. She asked:

"Where's the Purple Limited? Ain't it on time?"

The lunch-wagon clerk smirked and motioned toward the car-checker. "Ask him. He works fer th' road."



"Is the Limited late, mister?" inquired the girl.

The checker pulled out a dollar watch. "It must be late, miss. It was due here over ten minutes ago."

A flash of gratitude struck from the girl's hazel eyes. She went out the door, and slammed it shut. Her broken shoes slopped away into silence.

"Who was that?" asked the car-checker.

"Don't know! Some kid that lives up the line."

The car-checker paid for the pie and coffee, picked up his lantern, and walked to the railroad yard.

There was a long line of empties on the gravity-track whose numbers were wanted by the yard-master. Robert Larkins, known as "Lark," the car-checker, began taking the numbers of these cars:

"C. B. and Q., 54,796; Frisco, 16,004; C. M. and St. Paul, 27,333—"

Beneath the falling snow, where Lark paused at the last car, a view could be had of a water-tank and four polished ribbons of steel that vanished to the west.

Lark drew his muffler close around his throat, and wished that he were home with his uncle and out of the snow. He lifted one cold foot over the other. He thought of the chance J. J. D., the division superintendent, had given to him so that he could perfect himself in civil engineering. This chance, at car-checking, paid only twenty-five dollars a week. It was dismal work on a winter's night.

He had spent his boyhood days in Newhouse, the division headquarters where J. J. D. was the railroad Czar. Newhouse was the end of the first division of the C. W. and W. R. R., and the beginning of the second division.

A faint light shone through the snow when Lark turned away from the western view. He looked back. He hesitated and tried to locate the position of this light. It had seemed like a match's glow near or beneath the water-tank.

Lark decided that tramps crouched in waiting for a train going to Cotopaxi, the western terminal of the second division. He lowered his head, drooped his broad shoulders, and plunged in the direction of

Newhouse station. He had taken a few long strides when he glanced up and saw a blurred figure leaping from tie end to tie end, and coming toward him.

The freckle-faced girl of the lunch-wagon shielded her eyes from the rays of the lantern, stumbled, recovered her balance, and ran past Lark on her way to the water-tank.

Lark heard her broken shoes crunching the gravel. Slush splashed where melted snow lay between the ties. Then the girl was gone within the veil that covered the world that night.

A switch-engine's whistle tooted near the roundhouse. A string of assorted freight-cars—merchants' refrigerators—furniture flats piled with bridge girders, commenced snaking from the main line. A semaphore down the track turned from red to a clear white.

Lark dangled his lantern as he jogged to the yard-master's office. He climbed upon one corner of the station platform and stamped the snow from his shoes. He looked at his watch. The Purple Limited was thirty minutes overdue.

Clear was the track through the city and the extensive yards. All main-line signals were set to white. Red lights showed on the switches near the roundhouse. Locos breathed deeply, with now and then a lift of the valves, and a soft flutter of steam.

There appeared a call-boy from over the shining rails. He glanced at Lark and sliced an order:

"J. J. D. wants to see you in his office."

"Who? Me?" asked Lark.

"Sure!"

Lark let his lantern drop to within an inch of the platform, and put out the light. He went toward the division superintendent's office. A switchman in a red shirt came running from J. J. D.'s door. He waved a handful of train-orders.

Lark avoided this man and stepped up to a highly polished rail behind which sat two train-despatchers busy clicking telegraph instruments.

"J. J. D. wants to see me," he informed the nearest of the two despatchers. "I'm Larkins—car-checker!"

A pine door swung open. An aggressive

man sprang from a chair, spat on a worn carpet, and called above the clicking instruments:

"Come in, Lark!"

Lark went into the division superintendent's office, and closed the door. J. J. D. snapped a silk sleeve-holder, leaned in the chair, and exclaimed:

"There's been a warning sent out to all division points about the Purple Limited! Go down to the end of the yard and keep your eyes open for hoboes."

"All right!" said Lark.

J. J. D. thrust forward his elbows and jerked up his sleeves.

"Watch the water-tank!" he cautioned. "See that nobody gets on the blind baggage. There's a shipment in gold aboard the Limited to-night. She'll be along any minute, now!"

## CHAPTER II.

### THE MISSING TRAIN.

LARK hurried from J. J. D.'s office to light his lantern on the station platform.

Orders were expected to be obeyed on the C. M. and W. The Purple Limited was the fastest thing in the middle West.

The Limited, once the crack train on the line, had been reduced to an Atlantic-type loco, and one or two armored express cars during the period of a coal strike at the anthracite mines not far from Cotopaxi.

J. J. D., a home man with a charming, gushing wife, was responsible for the safety of the Purple Limited while on his division. The Limited, running light, skipped the division station at Newhouse, but stopped at the water-tank at the west end of the yard for water.

Lark reviewed these facts as he plunged through the snow in the direction of the water-tank. The line was clear, although there seemed to be a whine in the rails that denoted an approaching train.

He brought up standing where the street crossed the tracks behind the last gondola cars. Mike Ragan, a railroad detective, loomed from the direction of the lunch-wagon.

"Hey, Lark—going down to the end of the yard?"

"Yes! J. J. D.'s orders!"

"That 'll save me a walk. Watch and see that nobody climbs on the blind of the Purple Limited. I'm supposed to do it—but God! My feet are wet!"

Ragan was never a man to see romance in the rails or glory in escorting an occasional tramp to the jail at Newhouse. He generally idled with a partner, Joe Rear-don, who was laid up with rheumatism.

Lark looked east. "All right," he said, shifting his lantern. "I'll see that nobody gets aboard the Limited."

Ragan ran a thick finger around the inside of a wet collar. "That damn train will be th' death ov me!" he blurted. "Every night I watch it. Who's going to try to rob an armored car? Why, th' safes haven't got any combinations. You couldn't open them with a pile-driver."

"J. J. D.'s worried."

"Aw, he's always worried! It's a hell-ova job. Nothin' but trouble. An' he's got a wife that is some spender—believe me."

Lark moved away from the burly form of the detective, and started along the track. He reached a switch, and turned.

There rang in the rails the metallic whine of a fast train's approach. A white sliver of dazzling light lifted above the dark outlines of the station platform at Newhouse—stabbed through the overhead pall, and dropped to the road-bed. It bathed the lower yard with searching fire. It brought out details of the freight-cars on the sidings and the far-off water-tank.

Lark sprang aside. He stood holding his lantern and cap when the Purple Limited roared by. He caught a glimpse of a towering loco-boiler, a fireman on the apron between the engine and the tender, and a single, purple-painted express-car without windows or openings save a small, sealed door.

The Limited was gone in a swirling rush of snow flakes. It stopped at the water-tank. A shower of white sparks struck from the brake-shoes. It was off down the road again—tunneling the night like a crimson comet.



Lark pulled out his dollar watch. The Purple Limited had gone through Newhouse fifty minutes late. He replaced his timepiece, trudged forward to the water-tank, and flashed his lantern beneath the dripping shelter.

There seemed no evidence that any hoboes had climbed aboard the blind baggage at the tank. The slushy snow alongside the track was mixed with cinders and water. The spout was vertical, and in its correct position. Lark looked at this spout. Sometimes careless firemen left it extended over the road-bed.

He started walking toward Newhouse. A chance ray of light from his lantern revealed an unexpected color in the snow. Lark stooped to pick up a piece of red cloth, evidently torn from a woman's skirt. It was cut in the shape of a mask. Two strings dangled from his frosted fingers. Two eye-holes appeared when he pressed through them with his thumb.

Lark's first action, after pocketing the mask, was to jerk his lantern until the light flared out. The mask was a reminder that there might be train-robbers about the water-tank. He blinked, and attempted to penetrate the gloom. He waited, and tried again. A faint light shone across the snow in the direction the Purple Limited had gone. This light came from a switch-lamp at the junction of a stone quarry. The Limited had rushed by it at full speed.

It came to Lark that duty was expected from him in the matter of the red mask. He stepped over the slippery ties and bent beneath the water-tank. He searched the place. There was evidence in burnt matches and a crumpled newspaper that tramps or robbers had hidden from the prying eyes of railroad detectives.

Lark methodically gathered all the matches he could find, and crammed them into his pocket. He spread the newspaper, refolded it, and then thrust it under his coat.

Picking up the lantern, he climbed to the road-bed, looked once more to the west and the faint switch-lamp, and turned his steps in the direction of Newhouse station. J. J. D. might still be on duty. It was the division superintendent's business to know

of the mask found where the Purple Limited had stopped for water.

Lark quickened his steps. He stretched two ties with effort. The lantern swung at his side. It knocked his knees. He drew down his cap's vizor and scanned the great car-dotted yard. Red lights as well as green ones showed on either hand. Locos stood at the roundhouse. A cloud of mingled steam and smoke rose through the snow. The metal plates before the locos sent up white vapor. Helpers and firemen moved grotesquely within a yellowish glare from the ash pits.

Ragan called to Lark. The railroad detective crossed the yard on a long diagonal.

"Come on!" said Lark. "Come with me to J. J. D."

Lark did not wait for the detective. He sprang on the station platform, set his lamp on a baggage-truck, and ran for the train despatcher's door. From this door, muffled in a black coat that reached to his heels, J. J. D. emerged with the air of a man who had done a night's duty.

"Hold on, Mr. Darrah!" called Lark. "Something may have happened to the Purple Limited."

J. J. D. let a fawn-colored glove drop to the planks. He picked it up. He eyed Lark sharply. "What could happen?" he asked. "She's reported making up time at Green Creek."

Green Creek was a telegraph station seven miles beyond the yard limits at Newhouse.

Lark drew out the red mask. "Found it by the water-tank," he said.

Darrah took the mask and moved toward a light that streamed through a window. He turned it over. Ragan lumbered onto the platform and started puffing at Lark's side. "What d'ye want ov me?" he inquired.

The division superintendent stepped between Lark and the detective. "You found this thing by the water-tank?"

"Yes! It was lying near the track."

"Were you at the tank when the Limited stopped?"

"No. I got there too late."

Darrah crammed the mask in a pocket. He reached for the knob to the door that

led into the despatcher's office. "I'll check her up," he said. "I bet the Limited has gone by the Butte tunnel. She should be at Cotopaxi Junction."

Lark and Ragan followed the division superintendent through the door. Darrah leaned across the polished rail.

"Where's 43?" he asked.

The despatcher glanced up from a pile of tissues, scratched his head, lifted a green eye-shade, and opened a telegraph-key.

"She ought to have been reported at C. J. I don't remember getting it. Say, Fred—"

Fred was the second despatcher on the death-trick, from midnight to 8 A.M. He pushed back a wooden chair and crossed to the first despatcher's side. "Did C. J. report 43?" demanded the superintendent. "Look it up! Look it up!"

Lark felt a sinking of spirits when both despatchers shook their heads and commenced looking over the train-sheets for a second time.

"The Purple Limited went through Green Creek at 12.17; she never reached the siding," explained the chief despatcher. "She hasn't been reported at C. J. yet. It's—" The operator wheeled to glance upward at a standard wall-clock.

"The devil!" exclaimed Darrah. "Why, she must be in th' ditch! Call C. J. Find out!"

Lark watched J. J. D.'s florid face grow purple. The division superintendent climbed over the polished rail instead of going around by the gate, and snatched at a telephone.

"Give me Broad River Bridge!" he shouted. "Yes! Yes! Broad River Bridge. This is J. J. D. You know who I am!"

Broad River Bridge was a span with a draw across Broad River. There was no telegraph office at the bridge. A telephone line paralleled the telegraph line on the C. M. and W. This was a precaution in case of strikes by telegraph-operators or severe storms.

Darrah got the bridge connection. Lark and Ragan passed through the gate and stood by the phone.

"Is this th' bridge-tender?" asked the division superintendent. "Hello! This is J. J. D. You know me! When did the Purple Limited go by? Ye-s—43, going west? Hel-lo—twelve twenty-sev-en—are you sure you saw it?"

"That's about right," Ragan said to Lark. "Green Creek at 12.17. Broad River Bridge at—12.27. It's exactly thirteen miles."

Darrah hung up the receiver. "The Limited went across the bridge all right!" he said. "She's stalled between the bridge and Tie-Siding, this side of Cotopaxi Junction."

"There's the coal-mines," suggested Lark.

"No night operator there!" declared J. J. D. "Damn it! They won't give us enough men to find out where our trains are!"

The two despatchers galvanized into sudden life. They began talking to Cotopaxi—Cotopaxi Junction, and other way-stations beyond Butte Tunnel and the coal-mines. The many telegraph instruments in the despatcher's room clicked metallicly. They poised their aluminum bars and then seemed to clamp their teeth.

Darrah shouted orders like a pump-gun. The big superintendent threw off his overcoat and sent it flying in the air. He roared at Ragan:

"Jump over to the roundhouse and tell the night yard-master to call out the wrecking crew! Tell him to hook on .076. She ought to be ready for the extra, east."

Lark had often marveled at the grasp of detail which Darrah showed. J. J. D. was not a theoretical railroad man. He had been almost everything on the C. M. and W., from call-boy up. He radiated strength like a high-pressure boiler.

"She's probably in the ditch!" he told the chief operator. "In th' ditch somewhere on the other side of Broad River. May be at Butte Tunnel or the coal-mines. No word at Cotopaxi Junction?" he asked.

"None, Mr. Darrah. C. J. says that extra—east—54, came through there at 12.13. There's three freights on the sidings waiting for the Purple Limited."

Lark did not understand telegraphy. He



had a vague idea as to the duties of a train despatcher. They had always seemed to him well-paid men with reserved airs. Darrah was different. The superintendent knew the first names of half the men who worked at Newhouse. He was on terms of familiarity with the directors and the wipers.

Suddenly Lark felt J. J. D.'s flashing eyes upon him. He moved away from the telephone.

"Go outside!" ordered Darrah. "What's that just came in?"

Lark strode past the railing and opened the door that led to the station-platform. A funnel of white light turned the falling snowflakes into tinsel splendor. A giant loco squatted on the rails. Back of it was a long line of shade-drawn Pullmans.

"Extra, east!" said Lark through the open door. "She's arrived!"

Darrah closed a telegraph-key and dashed by the two despatchers. He grasped Lark's arm.

"Get that engineer here, quick."

Lark sped across the rails and shouted up to the engine-driver—a stout man in clean overalls: "J. J. D. wants you!"

The conductor came slushing along the train. He followed Lark and the engineer to where J. J. D. was standing.

"Where'd you pass 43?" asked the superintendent.

The engineer looked uneasy. The conductor shifted a brightly polished lantern from one arm to the other. He scratched his head, replaced his cap, and said:

"We didn't pass her, I guess. I didn't see her."

"And, you?" J. J. D. tugged at his bulldog mustache as he asked the engineer that question.

The engineer looked at his loco, spat to the snow, and replied:

"Well, it's a double track, and I don't always see them—especially, on a night like this. But I'll say we didn't pass 43—unless she was on a siding with her headlight dimmed."

"Call the fireman!" roared Darrah.

The engineer went over the tracks, saying:

"We both can't leave the engine. I'll call him."

The fireman was an undersized, sallow-faced, grimy man who stuttered like a steam-valve feathering steam.

He answered J. J. D.'s question after a blank stare around the yard.

"We — we — didn't — did-n't see 43. Nothin' passed us goin' west—that—that—I sa-w."

"Get out the wrecking crew!" ordered J. J. D. "We've lost a train on my division!"

### CHAPTER III.

#### A VAIN SEARCH.

J. J. D. charged back into the train despatcher's office and issued a few close-worded despatches to hold all trains at Cotopaxi Junction and Newhouse. These orders, flashed on the wires, practically tied up the first, second, and third division of the C., M. and W.

The superintendent emerged from the office with his overcoat half on and a fighting fire in his eyes. He swung his arm—finished putting on the coat, and called to Ragan, who had returned from the round-house, where the wrecking crew were climbing on top of two flat cars and a derrick-car.

The railroad detective lurched across the rails.

"Notify the city police," said Darrah, "that a number of train robbers probably got aboard 43 at the water-tank. Have them search the lower end of the yard."

Ragan disappeared in the despatcher's office, and began telephoning to headquarters. He came out when Lark and Darrah sprinted toward the wrecking train. He followed the superintendent into the cab of the engine. Sam, a passenger engineer, was ready.

"We've got rifles!" grunted J. J. D. "We've got a clear line. Let her out, Sam! Stop just this side of the water-tank."

Lark climbed upon the tender, turned over a shovel, and sat down with his heels digging in the damp coal. Snow slanted across the cab and plastered his face. Darrah, Ragan, and the loco engineer, leaned

from the cab. A score of rugged round-house men and red-shirted track-layers sprawled under whatever shelter they could find on the flat cars.

The fast loco cleared the switch points and rolled west through the car-scattered yard. Lark watched Darrah. The superintendent was greatly excited. There was a faint chance that the Purple Limited might be on some siding between Broad River and Cotopaxi Junction. It could be in the ditch or down one of the many cañons near Butte Tunnel.

Lark, watching the superintendent, and recalling the red mask—the matches—the furtive-looking girl who had asked about the Limited, reached the same conclusion as Darrah. The bullion train was in the hands of bandits who had climbed aboard at the water-tank.

Darrah raised his hand and ordered the engineer to slow the wrecking train. The electric headlight spotted through the snow and brought out the details of the water-tank. Lark climbed into the cab. Darrah turned.

"Jump out!" he said. "You, Ragan—and you, Lark. Look around the tank."

Lark swung off the engine—secured a lantern from the first flat car, and followed by the detective, who also carried a lantern, they made a careful inspection of the tank—the snow surrounding the piles, and went some distance down the track.

J. J. D. was waiting as he leaned from the cab. "Nothing new," said Lark. "We'll have to let up until daylight."

"Can't you follow the tracks in the snow?"

"No. It's too slushy."

"All right! Jump aboard! Open her up," he ordered the engineer. "Stop at Green Creek."

Darrah went over the tender and grasped the shoulder of the wrecking boss, who had worked for the C., M. and W. for thirty years.

"Set two lights," commanded J. J. D. "Set them so your men can watch both sides of the track. The Purple Limited went into the ditch somewhere. Perhaps we can find the spot."

The lights were set, with tin reflectors

throwing the rays out on the swift-moving snow that covered the road-bed. Darrah returned to the tender and faced Lark.

"If that train was robbed," he blurted, "I'm going to hold you responsible!"

"I couldn't get down to the tank any sooner, Mr. Darrah. I saw tramps or somebody striking matches there when I was checking cars. I didn't think anything of it until you told me about the Purple Limited."

"That's the trouble. You don't think fast enough! I can't be everywhere all at once, on the second division!"

Lark felt sorry for J. J. D. The superintendent was an aggressive man—underpaid for the responsibility he assumed, and fair-minded in the midst of his trials. Strikes, wrecks, a coal embargo—a freight tie-up at the eastern terminal, all had come that winter. And now, to top these disasters, was the crack train in the ditch, or more likely, stuck up by bandits.

Darrah leaned from the cab to look ahead where the electric light flickered on the gleaming rails. He narrowed his eyes to slits. The snow pelted his ruddy cheeks. He drew back out of the wind.

The locomotive engineer shut off steam and fingered the airbrake lever.

"What are you doing?" growled J. J. D.

Answering softly, after the manner of a man who knew his business, the engine-driver said to Darrah:

"There's something lying 'longside th' track, sir. See it?"

Ragan, Lark, and Darrah sprang from the engine's step when the wrecking train stopped. They went ahead, slid down a clammy embankment, and gathered around a man in overalls who lay face downward in the snow. Lark turned the man over. It was the engineer of the Purple Limited. A red bruise as large as the lens of a switch-lantern was upon the engineer's forehead.

"He's breathing," said Lark to Darrah. "He was thrown off the Limited."

"You and Ragan carry him to the wrecking cars. There's another one over there!"

J. J. D. plunged through the snow, and lifted a second man who had fared even worse than the engineer. His right arm



was broken. A welt showed across his chin. His greasy jacket was torn from his shoulders, exposing a gray shirt.

"What happened?" asked J. J. D. into the fireman's cinder-clogged ear. "Who hit you?"

Lark returned to the superintendent's side in time to hear the fireman's answer.

"Who h-it me? Why—three of them. They came over—th' tender when we were pullin' out of th' yard—after takin' water at th' tank. 'Bail up,' they said. They had big guns, an' their faces were covered with red masks. One of them—"

The fireman wiped his face with the back of his left hand.

"One of them sapped old Dad with a 'Johnston-bar' an'—laid him cold. I put up a fight—but it was no use, super. Off we go when th' fellow at th' throttle slowed to about five miles an hour."

"Can you walk?" asked J. J. D.

"I don't know. I got up once an' saw th' Purple Limited hittin' it around that curve there. She whistled for Green Creek. Then I fell over, an' must have gone to sleep."

"What did the men look like?"

"Two were tall an' one was short, super."

Lark caught a side-flash from Darrah's eye. He circled in the snow and attempted to prove the truth of the fireman's story. He found, beside the place where the fireman had lain, a lump of hard coal and a heavy iron bar. It was evident that the train-robbers had thrown these missiles from the engine.

Darrah's signal put Lark on his mettle. The superintendent had intimated in that quick flash that everybody's statements concerning the train-robbers were going to be checked up. It was the first time Lark had been in J. J. D.'s confidence. He decided to make good.

Stopping to examine the road-bed on both sides of the track, he walked some distance ahead of the standing engine. The electric head-lamp made the night as bright as day. There was nothing suspicious on the snow. The robbers had boarded the blind at the water-tank, waited a few minutes, crawled across the tender, stuck up

the engineer and fireman—thrown them off, and went about their business. They had selected one of the worst nights of the year. There was no messenger in the sealed express car.

Lark heard the engine whistle for his recall. He ran down the track and climbed aboard.

Darrah stood talking to the fireman of the Purple Limited. The engineer of that train lay in the coal where two of the wrecking crew were bandaging the wound on his head.

The train gained speed. J. J. D. shouted above the roar of the clanking drivers: "Never mind stopping at Green Creek! Go right to the bridge. Watch both sides of the track. You know me! Watch both sides!"

The wrecking train gained speed—whistled for Green Creek station, and dashed through the yard.

"No use stopping here," Darrah repeated to Lark. "The operator reported the Purple Limited all right."

Lark leaned and watched the road-bed. The two side-lights, aided by the head-lamp on the engine, brought out all details of tracks and ties. Shadows moved. Telegraph-poles flashed by. The train rocked and clattered over switch points and culverts.

Again the whistle sounded.

"Slow down on the draw. Stop!" snapped J. J. D. "I want to talk to the bridge-tender."

The engineer stopped the wrecking train in the center of Broad River. The lattice work of the huge draw was coated with snow. A faint light glowed high in the bridge-tender's tower. A door opened. An old man, leaning on a cane, looked out. Darrah cupped his hand and shouted:

"When did the Purple Limited—43, go by?"

"Hey?"

"When did 43 go by?"

The bridge-tender turned and disappeared. He came into vision again. He answered in a high, cracked voice:

"Th' Purple Limited—one car an' an engine, went hell-roarin' by, fifty-two minutes late. That you, super?"

"You know me!" shouted Darrah. "Are you sure about that train?"

"Sure! I ain't got much else to do up here but watch 'em go by. What's th' matter?"

Darrah's reply was to wheel toward the engineer of the wrecking train.

"Go on. Hump her up! We'll try Butte Tunnel next."

Butte Tunnel was a day telegraph-office on the C., M. and W. The station, a tiny affair, was east of the mouth of the tunnel.

Lark sprang off the engine when it slowed for the station, and at J. J. D.'s orders, began pounding on a pine door. He kicked a panel with his heel. There sounded the sleepy stirring of the day operator. A shade went up. A window lifted to make room for a shock of yellow hair and a thin-faced operator, who stared first at Lark and then at the wrecking train on the main line.

"Did you see anything of the Purple Limited?" called Darrah from the engine. "No. 43?"

"N-o. I've been sleepin', super. I went off trick at eight o'clock."

"Didn't you hear it go by?"

"Seems to me I heard something around one o'clock. Must have been 43."

Darrah looked at Ragan. "You better get off here," he said. "Get out the section-gang and go through the tunnel. See if you can find anything. Tell that operator to stay up. Report to the despatchers if you find any trace of the Limited."

Lark avoided Ragan's leaping form, and climbed on the engine. The engineer opened the throttle. J. J. D. pulled out a black cigar, bit off the end savagely, and started chewing. Between bites, he said:

"The Limited couldn't jump the track without marking the ties. She passed Broad River. She was heard at Butte Tunnel. Now watch the tunnel when we go through. Lean 'way out, Lark."

Lark felt the damp air of the tunnel! He grasped a handle on the tender and almost touched his face to the rocky walls. He glanced back. Hard, straight-browed wrecking men were searching the stones. Their forms showed angular in the light from the two lanterns. Smoke began to

choke Lark. He coughed—doubled up, and found J. J. D. grasping him round the waist.

"We're through the tunnel," said Darrah. "Nothing yet. Now get ready to drop off at the coal-mines."

The coal-mines beyond Butte Tunnel were worked by the C., M. and W. The coal was obtained in almost any quantity desired. The tipples loomed through the snow. Coal-cars appeared on long sidings. Lark swung, jumped, and picked himself up when the engine slowed at a switch-light set for a clear main line. He examined the lock. He went up the siding a hundred yards or more. Three or four filled cars stood with their wheels blocked with wedges. Beyond these cars were many empty gondolas.

He returned to the main line, swung aboard the engine, and rode to the next switch. This siding was an abandoned grade leading to a worked-out mine. The track was torn up in a score of places. A huge timber lay across the road-bed. It had not been moved in days. Lark examined the snow and cinders.

"Nothing went up there," he told Darrah when he went back to the engine. "Are there any more sidings?"

"One more, at the station. The operator ought to know if 43 was shunted from the main line."

The day operator shook his head sleepily when questioned by J. J. D. "I've been right here," he said. "The switch is locked. There is a string of empties above the tipple. Nothing went up there, boss. I'll swear to it."

J. J. D.'s orders to the operator were to remain awake and report to the despatchers at Newhouse. "There'll be a railroad detective and a section gang along soon!" he called when the wrecking train started moving. "Send their report to Newhouse."

"Now," added J. J. D. to Lark—"now, we'll try Tie Siding."

Lark managed between swings of the locomotive to tell J. J. D. all about the matches and newspaper he had found under the water-tank at Newhouse. The superintendent was keenly interested.

"Keep them for clues!" he said.



"What's worrying me, Lark, is the disappearance of 43. I know it was robbed. We've got the country roused. But what did the two tall men and the short one do with the Purple Limited? Answer that!"

Lark's youthful eyes grew thoughtful. He waited for the next roll of the engine.

"We'll go back over the line at daylight," he suggested.

J. J. D. snorted and tossed away his half-chewed cigar.

"Wait till we get to Tie Siding," he said.

Tie Siding, a lumber spur, proved very much awake when the wrecking train rolled in and stopped at the platform. A marshal, with a tin star, followed by the night operator, came running up to J. J. D.

"Did you see anything of her?" they both asked in unison.

J. J. D. looked the marshal squarely in the eye. "She passed over Broad River Bridge," he said. "She was heard in Butte Tunnel. Between Butte Tunnel and here—she's disappeared. We've examined every siding on the line."

"That's kinda spooky," the marshal replied.

J. J. D. wiped the snow from his florid face.

"I'll not sleep until I find the Purple Limited! She's somewhere on my division!"

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### ON THE CARPET.

IT was noon when the wrecking train returned from Tie Siding and the way stations along the second division of the C., M. and W.

J. J. D., aided by Lark and the wrecking crew, and assisted by every constable, track-walker, and station-agent on that section of the line, had nothing to report but failure.

The Purple Limited, carrying over a million in gold and notes, had vanished in the frosty air. The search that was made extended on every side track from Broad River Bridge to Tie Siding. The section of road between Tie Siding and Cotopaxi Junction was gone over by a group of de-

tectives from Cotopaxi. They reported no sign of the train.

J. J. D. worked out three or four surmises and found nothing. The coal-mines came in for particular attention. It seemed possible that the Limited might have been shunted to the tracks leading to the mines, and dropped down the shafts. There was no evidence of this. The miners promised a thorough search.

Butte Tunnel was examined from one side of the mountain to the other. The cañon, near where the road ran, was unsuccessfully searched. Two posses, headed by marshals, rode through the back country in a chance hunt for the train-robbers. They were still riding when the wrecking train slowly pulled into the yard at Newhouse.

The traffic manager of the C., M. and W., the general superintendent, and the chief of detectives from the Eastern terminal, were waiting for J. J. D. There was going to be war, and J. J. D. was not prepared for it.

He told Lark, the wrecking boss, and the two injured trainmen who had been thrown from the cab of the engine that drew the Purple Limited to be on the carpet at one o'clock. "On the carpet" was J. J. D.'s way of saying to come to his office for an investigation.

Lark moved across the yard and entered the lunch-wagon. He was famished. The waiter served three helpings of beans and brown bread before Lark looked around the lunch place. He spied a paper on one end of the counter. It was an extra got out by the *Newhouse Chronicle*.

"A Million Stolen," ran the head-line. "Crack train on the C., M. and W. disappears between Newhouse and Cotopaxi. The Purple Limited was said to have been boarded by train-robbers at the water-tank south of here. No clue to the robbers."

Lark read on—held his cup to his lips, and devoured the items concerning the Purple Limited. Much of the information was inaccurate. Two cars were said to be lost. The engine crew were supposed to be missing.

"Did you see the Purple Limited go through here about midnight last night?" Lark asked the lunch-wagon waiter.

"I saw it. I was standing on the steps there when it went by."

Lark glanced at himself in a silver-bordered mirror. His eyes were bright. There was a spot of soot on the tip of his nose. Perhaps his cheeks had sunk in slightly. Otherwise, he appeared normally healthy.

"Well, I saw it, too," he admitted. "You remember that girl asked if it was on time. I've been out on the road all night. We've searched every foot of the track from here to Cotopaxi. The Limited went right up in smoke."

"So they say," drawled the waiter. "I guess it looks bad for J. J. D. We'll have a new super soon."

Lark indignantly clutched his fists. J. J. D. was the best friend he had. He paid the check, added a dime for the waiter, and slushed through the thawing snow in the direction of the division superintendent's office. The wrecking train stood on a siding awaiting orders.

The station-platform was crowded with railroad men and reporters from near-by towns. Lark saw Micky, the call-boy, strutting around and looking important. Burke and O'Connor, the engineer and fireman of the Limited, rested against a baggage truck. Burke's head was bandaged. O'Connor had his broken arm in a sling.

Telegraph-operators, who had seen the Limited go by their stations, called to division headquarters to give their testimony. A track-walker, whose duty it was to walk through Butte Tunnel every two hours, was telling a group of newspaper men that he did not see the Limited, but had heard it.

Micky the call boy ran up to Lark. "Wouldn't it curl your hair?" he said. "A regular wild West train-robbery right on our line!"

Lark smiled. Micky was generally seen reading a dime novel when on duty.

The call-boy entered the train-despatcher's office. Lark turned to follow him, but stepped aside when a handsome, healthy woman came out, clad in expensive furs. He heard a switchman say:

"There goes J. J. D.'s wife. She would keep two men broke at th' present price of things. Look at her furs. They're the real thing!"

Lark changed color. Mrs. Darrah had been kind to him. She had invited him on several occasions to her home, when the railroad boys were royally entertained with music and cake and ice-cream.

J. J. D. was known as a spender in New-house. It was said that he could not keep money in his pocket. He owed almost every merchant—but then a railroad superintendent's credit was good for almost any amount, in merchandise.

Lark was one of a hundred admirers of the overworked division superintendent. He had not yet had an opportunity to fight the matter out with any man. He was willing to lay down his life for J. J. D. Darrah knew his uncle, and Darrah had given him the job at car-checking when there were others seeking the place.

A second figure strode out from J. J. D.'s office while Lark hesitated on the platform. This man, stately and severe in a penetrating manner, was Converse, the chief detective. He had once made the boast, in print, that no train-robber would ever get away with a hold-up on the C., M. and W.

There was a worried look on the detective's face. He moved onward in the throng and walked in the direction of the roundhouse.

Lark again attempted to go through the partly opened door. He caught, as his hand touched the knob, the unmistakable feeling that he was being stared at. He turned around.

A slender and poorly dressed girl, with a torn shawl over her brown hair, was huddled against the side of the station. She shivered in the slush. The dripping eaves had soaked her shoulders. Lark was conscious of the piteous appeal of an unusually large pair of hazel eyes.

She was the girl he had seen in the lunch-wagon. She it was who had asked concerning the Purple Limited.

Lark advanced a step toward her. She cringed away, pressed her hands together, and fled. As she ran she darted at him a frightened back glance. She was gone through the crowd of railroad men and reporters. Her shawl bobbed where she crossed the west-bound track. Lark crammed his fists into his pockets. He



saw Micky, the call-boy, regarding him with a broad, tooth-broken grin.

"Who is that girl?" asked Lark.

"Th' one you was flirtin' with?"

"Yes," admitted Lark.

"Aw, gee—she's some homeless Kate! Lives down th' line. I see her often. She's always snoopin' round here."

"Don't you know her name, Micky?"

"Sure, I do. Gimme a nickel, an' I'll tell you. D'you want to date her up? It can be done!"

The precocious call-boy took the nickel Lark handed to him; eyed it, turned it over, and pushed it to one side of his mouth.

"Her name is Nan," he said. "That's what th' roundhouse boys call her. That's all I know, unless you gimme another nickel."

Lark decided that the second nickel would be wasted. He had the girl in mind when he went past the despatcher's door and waited in line before J. J. D.'s office. Nan, or whatever her name was, had inquired about the Purple Limited. She had hurried along the track and toward the water-tank before the Limited arrived.

The clue of the mask, the homeless girl, the matches and the newspaper, all should form a link in the chain, thought Lark. Then again, they might not help much in the investigation going on in J. J. D.'s office.

The closed door, behind which men's voices were raised, held a fascination for Lark. He realized that J. J. D. was fighting for his railroad position. It wasn't every day that a group of news-hungry reporters and swivel-chair railroad directors got the chance to blame a superintendent for losing a train.

They were going it good and strong in J. J. D.'s office. Lark saw two well-dressed men come out with flushed faces. Then the old bridge-tender at Broad River went in and gave his testimony. He came into the despatcher's office fuming and tapping his crooked cane.

"I told 'em what I know—that's what I did!" he blurted to the line-in-waiting. "Forty-three went over th' draw like a comet. I wuz lookin' through my window. She didn't even whistle—which was expect-

ed of her. She just streaked through th' snow."

"Was the draw open at all during the night?" asked a despatcher.

"No, it wasn't! It ain't been open in days. There's nothin' coming up an' down river this weather."

The old man, who was called "Pop," stamped out to the platform. The next to be called into J. J. D.'s office was the telegraph-operator at Butte Tunnel. Lark tried to hear what he said by bending forward. The door was slightly ajar. Tobacco-smoke drifted out.

"You know me!" exclaimed J. J. D. "Are you sure you heard 43 go by?"

"I heard a train go by," was the answer. "Then I rolled over, an' dropped off to sleep."

The track-walker at Butte Tunnel was summoned after the operator. This man had no recollection of having seen 43. He admitted under J. J. D.'s questions that he had gone to the section-house between twelve and one, for coffee and a rest. He couldn't exactly remember the precise time he was away from the tunnel.

"Get your pay!" roared J. J. D. "You had your orders not to leave the track."

The track-walker came from the office with a surly grin on his face. He was the first to be fired during the investigation. Lark cherished a good glimpse of the man in case he wanted to question him in the future.

"Larkins!" called J. J. D.'s chief clerk through the door.

Lark stepped into the office. Besides J. J. D. and the chief clerk, there were two eastern detectives, a stenographer, the traffic manager, and a representative of an insurance company. This representative was the most worried man of the group. His company had insured the contents of the safes aboard the Purple Limited.

J. J. D. sat at his desk with his coat off. He glanced at Lark, snapped the silk arm-band on his left sleeve, and said:

"I've called you, Larkins, so that these gentlemen can hear about the light you saw under the water-tank—the mask you picked up in the snow—and any other item

that might give us a lead. Is this the mask?"

J. J. D. swung and held out the red mask.

Lark nodded. He regarded the men through the tobacco-smoke. Their eyes were fixed on the bit of red calico, tied at the corners with common string.

"Now, where is the newspaper you found under the tank?"

Lark pulled out of his pocket a grease-stained copy of the *Newhouse Chronicle*. It had been printed three weeks before the day of the train robbery. J. J. D. passed the paper to the detectives without comment.

"The matches, Larkins?"

Lark extended seven burnt matches. They were known as "parlor matches." Each had been struck and tossed away.

J. J. D. shook his head. "Not much in those," he said. "Tramps might have left them under the tank. The grease on the newspaper may come from butter or a 'hand-out.'"

The traffic manager, a pursy man with white whiskers, snorted as he rose from his chair.

"Where are we getting to?" he inquired testily. "What I want to know is—where is the train? How could a train disappear on a double-track road, with all modern appliances? There's been gross neglect somewhere!" The manager looked accusingly at J. J. D.

Lark fingered his cap. He faced the door.

"Hold on!" said Darrah.—"Wait, Larkins."

Lark remained near the door.

"Now, see here!" rasped the traffic manager. "I'm expecting the president this afternoon. I've got to make a report to him. The eastern papers are filled with details of the robbery—if robbery it was. What am I going to tell him?"

J. J. D. fell back in his chair and thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest. He crossed one leg over the other. His face flamed to the color of red pottery. His mustache bristled.

"I'd resign right now!" he exclaimed. "But it's up to me to clear the mystery.

It's my division! I'm trying to get a line on the robbers. Haven't I had three hundred track-walkers, section-hands, special deputies, and marshals scouring the road-bed and the back country between Broad River Bridge and Cotopaxi Junction? What did they find? Nothing! Those men are still hunting for the Purple Limited."

"You must have a fine division when a crack train can be wiped off the map!" said the traffic manager.

The air of the office became tense. Lark expected that J. J. D., who was a big man in every way—muscles and shoulders and hands—would spring from his chair and throttle the traffic manager.

Instead, J. J. D. began toying with his arm-band as he chewed away on his mustache. "This car-checker here," he said finally, "walked down the track when he saw the Purple Limited slow for the water-tank at the west end of the yard. He found the mask, picked up the paper and matches, and came in and reported his suspicions to me.

"He is to be commended. He is one of the last men who saw the train. The others are the bridge-tender, the operator at Green Creek, and the fireman and engineer of the Limited. Shall we call them in?"

The traffic manager whispered to the detectives. They assented. Lark opened the door ahead of the chief clerk, and left the office. He felt that J. J. D., hounded by the railroad officials, had gone out of his way to stick up for him in the matter of the water-tank's inspection.

Lark remained around the station platform and watched everybody. The engineer and fireman stepped into J. J. D.'s office and emerged somewhat crestfallen. They limped across the tracks. The blows they had received in defending the Purple Limited had not been softened by J. J. D.'s searching questions. To cap the matter, from Lark's view-point, a detective, with a slouch hat far over his eyes, was trailing the two men.

Distrust was on every hand. The eastern directors and the insurance company had thrown a cordon of sleuths about Newhouse. No employee of the road would be

free from a searching scrutiny and investigation until the missing train was found.

Lark heard the distant whistle of an extra coming from the west. He ran across the tracks to see Ragan arrive. The detective was covered with mud and snow. He shook his head at Lark's questions, and went into the train despatcher's office. His inspection of Butte Tunnel and the mountain had proved fruitless. A track-walker, who accompanied Ragan as far as the station, told Lark that they had even dredged both banks of Broad River.

"Nothin' went off there," he said. "Ties ain't marked, anyway. Th' river ain't deep enough to cover a big express car an' a locomotive."

Lark began to wonder when the investigation would end. It was three o'clock. Men dashed in and out of J. J. D.'s office. Some scattered over the yard. Others hurried to town. The place was like a hive disgorging indignant bees.

The peppery traffic manager and the two eastern detectives appeared. They stood and talked with the chief, who had been questioning the men at the roundhouse. All three detectives walked away. The traffic manager's private car was on a siding. He started for this, hesitated, and turned when J. J. D. stepped out of the door, followed by the insurance adjuster.

Lark edged close to the group. A reporter elbowed him to one side against the station. He closed his fists, thought better of the action, and watched J. J. D.

The division superintendent looked wilted and uneasy. He commenced buttoning his coat. A newsboy ran across the tracks and thrust a paper under J. J. D.'s chin.

"Wuxtra—mis-ter? All about th' big train-robbery!"

J. J. D. glared at the boy. The traffic manager lifted one polished boot. The boy dodged into the crowd. Lark moved toward the superintendent. He wanted to be on hand in case of trouble. One crook of J. J. D.'s little finger would call for a crushing punch somewhere among the insolent manager's white whiskers. Lark hated that man.

War was on with a cutting nod when J. J. D. exclaimed:

"I don't want this damn job! You know me! I'll stick it out until we find that train. Then I'll quit!"

"You're fired!" snarled the manager.

"No! I'll resign when the time comes."

Lark intercepted a flash from J. J. D.'s eyes. He moved closer, and drew back his right arm. There was a world of loyalty in the action.

J. J. D. shook his head.

Slowly Lark's arm dropped to his side. The traffic manager and the insurance man walked stiffly to the private car. J. J. D. crammed his hands into his overcoat pockets.

He strode over the tracks. Lark, on watch, saw a detective dodge behind a freight car and disappear in the same direction Darrah had gone.

## CHAPTER V.

### A GIRL NAMED NAN.

LARK left the railroad yard and went home at five o'clock. He told Micky, the youthful caller, that he would be back at nine. Micky promised to tell the yard-master.

The snow had stopped falling at New-house. A soft gray was in the lowering clouds. Slush and pools of water filled the streets. Lark trudged northward, crossed a trolley-track, and cut through a muddy field to his uncle's house.

Uncle Add, as he had learned to call the old man since childhood, was an ex-soldier in the Union army, and a plu-plus-perfect engineer of the old school. Uncle Add's income came from a pension which, although not large, was sufficient for the old man's needs.

He spent his days making models of locomotives—cultivating a garden, and talking with his cronies. He was over eighty. No one knew how much older he really was.

Lark entered the kitchen of the tiny cottage and found Uncle Add peeling potatoes by the stove. A large dog lay at the engineer's feet. A newspaper was spread upon the kitchen table.

"Suppose you've been lookin' for th' robbers?" began Uncle Add. "Been read-



in' all about it. Reminds me of old days on th' C., M. and W. when it was called the Short Line. It ain't very short now, since they built the road to Cotopaxi."

Lark took off his cap and coat, and sat down. He watched the old man for a minute or so. Uncle Add's eyes were gray-thatched and nearsighted. "Suppose you want some supper," he chuckled. "Well, I'm gettin' it. Was kinda delayed on account of losin' my spectacles. I had to read all about that robbery before I could peel th' spuds."

Lark told his uncle what he knew about the stick-up and the missing Purple Limited. He dwelt on the treatment J. J. D. had received from the western directors.

The old man poised his potato-knife and clicked his gold-filled teeth. "They don't make railroad men like J. J. D. nowadays. Why, he's been with th' road thirty years! He was chief clerk to th' division superintendent of th' first division which I was switchin' in th' yard at Anamosa."

Anamosa was the eastern terminal of the C., M. and W. Lark queried:

"Uncle, what is your idea concerning the robbery? I've told you everything I saw that night. I don't understand how a whole train could be missing."

"Neither do I, Lark. I guess it ain't missin' for them that go an' look for it, proper. They haven't looked at th' right place, that's all."

"Where is the right place, uncle?"

Uncle Add closed his eyes. His lips parted in slow thought. He opened both eyes and stared at Lark. "Years ago," he said, "there was a stick-up on th' line. I was at Cotopaxi when it happened. Th' robbers, there was two of them, climbed aboard a passenger train, cut off an express car, and took it down th' road a piece. They forced the messenger to open th' safe. They got away with thirty thousand dollars. They were caught and sent to the penitentiary."

"Who were the men?" asked Lark, very much interested.

Uncle Add knitted his brows. "Black Arnold was one. I forgot th' name of th' other. They were sent up for a considerable stretch, I recollects."

"Where did they rob the train, uncle?"

"At Mile-Post 243—just t'other side of Butte Tunnel."

Lark repeated the mile-post number to himself. He intended never to forget it.

"Do you think Black Arnold is still in the penitentiary?" he asked.

"Don't know. Likely he is. Or else he's dead."

Lark climbed the stairs and changed his shoes. He washed his face and hands in a tin basin, brushed his hair, and joined Uncle Add at supper.

"I didn't sleep a wink last night," he yawned, "and I guess I won't sleep any to-night. I'm going to watch around the lower end of the yard. J. J. D. is in trouble. It's up to me to help him."

The old man nodded. "Stick by them what stick by you!" he said. "It 'll turn out th' best in th' long run. J. J. D. got you the job at checkin'."

Lark rose from the table, and glanced at an eight-day clock on a kitchen shelf. He put on his cap, wrapped his muffler around his neck, and turned to the old man:

"There's a reward for the one who runs down the train-robbers, uncle."

"Sure as shootin'!" declared Uncle Add. "There's always a big reward. How much was in them safes, Lark? Th' paper says two million."

"It was a little over a million. The safes—there were three of them—were locked, and the combination-knobs taken away by the express agent at Anamosa. They always do that with the money shipments on the Purple Limited."

Uncle Add bent across the kitchen table and fastened upon Lark a shrewd scrutiny.

"Th' robbers knew it would take scads of time to open th' safes on that express car, Lark. That's why th' Purple Limited is missin'. They took the whole train, because it was easier that way."

"What do you mean, uncle?"

"Find th' robbers an' you'll find th' train. They're stickin' close to her, somewhere!"

Lark asked the old enginer many questions.

"Lark, it was a big job—an' it was

planned for a long time. That train is hid mighty safe, else it would have been found a long while ago."

"But where could they have hidden it, uncle?"

Uncle Add scratched his head in deep thought. "That bothers me a heap, Lark. I don't know. Like as not, there's a simple answer to all this that nobody has picked on."

Lark closed the kitchen door and tramped across the fields to the railroad-yard. He was thinking of the events of the day. J. J. D. would undoubtedly be in his office. The eastern detectives were scattered along the road from Newhouse to Cotopaxi. The marshals and posses were scouring the country. Suspects were being brought in. The whereabouts of the missing train might come to light at any moment. The search might continue through the night. A million in money wasn't stolen every day.

The yard-master's office, back of the station, was a hive of activity. Congested traffic, on account of the closing of the road, made double duty. Each train, in and out of Newhouse, had to be checked. Lark took his orders from a clerk—trimmed and lighted his lantern, and set off around the station.

He discerned the lights of the private car on a siding. The traffic manager was holding a night session. Brakemen guarded the car. They carried long brake-sticks.

"Anything new?" Lark asked a train despatcher who had come off duty and was standing on the platform.

"Nothing new. J. J. D. is in his office with his coat off. The G. P. A is coming, and so is the president. It does beat hell!"

Lark went on down the yard. The slush underfoot made walking difficult. A bank of fleecy clouds obstructed the moon. Water trickled from the tops of the freight cars. The main line was clear, and trains were moving west.

It occurred to Lark as he began taking car numbers on a siding, that no matter how things turned out, J. J. D. would be fired. The division superintendent had given the best years of his life to the C., M. and W. He was not a young man. Young men were getting the responsible

railroad positions under the new administration. They were not exactly respecters of tradition—the romance of the rails. They cut red tape and slashed old-time schedules.

Lark wanted J. J. D. to stay on the road. He commenced thinking of the events since the Purple Limited disappeared. One clue stood out in his mind. The red mask—the matches—the newspaper, he had picked up from the snow, could scarcely be reckoned as clues.

The girl named Nan might lead to the robbers. She had been anxious about the Purple Limited. Her inquiry at the lunch-wagon was the first thin edge of a wedge. Lark remembered his second sight of the girl. She was hurrying toward the water-tank, where the three men boarded the engine. She had appeared on the station-platform, where news could be gained of the robbery. He had frightened her away with a stare.

Lark had heard of a gay-cat, or lookout for a yegg mob. The girl could well be a spy for the train-robbers. No one would suspect her. She could come and go as she willed.

Lark filled his train list and turned it over, slowly realizing that he was doing boy's work instead of a man's. His job ought to be to find Nan, whom Micky had called a "homeless Kate."

He started for the roundhouse. It would be a simple matter to ask the helpers and wipers about her. A "homeless Kate" was a car or a girl that wandered around a railroad.

A shrill cry, followed by loud laughter in the direction of the roundhouse, caused Lark to wheel beside the end car of the string. He crammed the car-list in his pocket—hitched up the lantern, and sprinted across the rails.

An ash-pit, half filled with glowing coals, illuminated the sand-box and a space in front of the roundhouse. A Mogul loco stood to one side of the sand-box, her drivers resting on the shining rails before the turn-table.

Lark saw three wipers struggling with Nan. She covered her face with her shawl. Her arms dropped to her sides. They lifted while her elbows jabbed. A greasy-faced

wiper slacked under her guard, and grasped the girl by the waist.

Lark set down his lantern, advanced—uppercut the wiper a stinging blow, and followed it up with another from his fist. He sent the youth sprawling on the cinders. The two others backed away from the girl.

"Come on!" urged Lark. "I'll punch all three of you!"

The girl raised her shawl and stared at Lark. She daubed her eyes with her freckled hands, veered to the right, and ran like a wild animal across the tracks. The wipers guffawed. Lark lowered his fists, grabbed the lantern, and started in chase of the girl. Her course was between box-cars and toward the far-off water-tank.

Lark gained on the fleeing figure. He came up to the girl's side. He clutched her by the arm.

"Hold on," he said. "I'm not meaning to hurt you."

"Oh, yes, you are! Lemme go! You're as bad as the others."

Lark caught a gleam from the girl's big eyes. She wheeled so as to face him. One broken shoe lifted over the other. Her lips parted in a ruby smile.

It came to him in a sudden panicky feeling that Nan was good looking. He had thought her a drab, until closely inspected. Then the soul of her appeared and lightened her features. They were rounded. Her nose was upturned. Her chin had a dimple. Her hair, meshed with the shawl, shone like gold in the rays of the oil lantern.

She pressed her hands on her breast. Lark moved away a foot or more. He ranged his glance over the girl's form. One stocking was torn. Her skirt was muddy. Her little body was half nourished.

"I'm sorry about that roundhouse bunch," said Lark.

The girl looked up the tracks to where the ash-pits glowed through the mist.

"I shouldn't have gone there," she admitted. "I came in town to see a movie. I crossed the roads. The boys called to me."

Lark pretended to trim his lantern. He shifted the globe and pinched the wick. All the time he was watching the girl in front of him. She seemed evasive and ill at

ease. Her glance wandered in the direction of the water-tank.

"I must be hurrying home!" she said, stepping across a track.

Lark held out a detaining hand—then seeing that the girl was determined upon leaving him, he strode resolutely after her.

"Stop a minute, won't you?"

The girl clutched her skirt, and ran down the track.

"Hey, miss! I want to talk with you!"

She was gone between two gondola-cars. Lark poised on a rail. He dashed along the ties in pursuit. He caught a glimpse of Nan rounding the tank. She sprang from the road-bed to run north, in a slushy path.

Lark knew a short cut through a yard and across a fence. He ducked his lantern and put out the light as he sprinted over the yard. He overtook the panting girl by the side of the road.

"Let me take you home?" he asked.

"Go 'way from me!"

"Where do you live?"

"I live a long ways from here."

"Near the trolley?"

"I ain't goin' to tell." She looked Lark over. Her eyes gleamed.

"You were going to take the trolley?" he said.

Lark offered his arm. "I'll see you that far. It's hard walking through this slush."

The girl showed her teeth in a half smile. It was a novel situation to have an escort to the trolley station. She acquiesced. "You can take me to Wentworth Avenue, if you want to," she said.

They walked side by side up the road until the trolley-tracks were reached.

"Here's where you leave me," said the girl.

"Can't I wait until a car comes along?"

She looked to the east. "One's coming now. What's your name?"

"Larkins. Robert Larkins."

"Mine's Nancy. I live about twenty miles from here, at Green Creek Bottoms."

"What's your last name?" asked Lark.

Nan signaled to the motorman. She stood bathed in the fierce white light that streamed from the electric head-lamp. She remained tantalizingly silent. As the car slowed, she jumped upon the step, grasped



the rail on her right, and tossed her head at Lark. He watched the conductor pull the bell-cord, and at the same time take the girl by the elbow as she climbed to the rear platform.

Lark thought rapidly. He could not board the same car without the girl seeing him. He looked again at the conductor. The man's face was familiar. Lark had seen him around the loop section of Newhouse. The number on his cap was 316. Lark fixed it in his mind as he smiled at the girl.

"Good-by!" he called, waving the unlighted lantern. He turned and made his way to the railroad-yard. He blamed himself for not following Nan. Green Creek Bottoms was twenty miles down the track. It would be easy to check up the girl. The conductor probably knew who she was.

Lark finished obtaining the numbers of the cars at the west end of the yard, yawned sleepily, and went toward the roundhouse. A wiper was standing alongside the sand-box. He eyed Lark, then snatched up a greasy spanner.

**This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.**

# Bad Bill Stark

by William Merriam Rouse



**B**AD BILL STARK set out on foot for the kitchen tunk at old Papineau's place. Kitchen tunk was the popular name for such social gatherings as were held on Ripley Road, and an invitation, which Bad Bill did not have, was unnecessary: all the world was a friend theoreti-

cally, and those who ran contrary to theory were kicked out, practically. A kitchen tunk meant dancing, hard cider, girls, and possibly a fight. Bill Stark would not have turned his steps backward for all the money old Daddy Papineau was said to have.

After ten years Stark had got back to

"Better keep away from here—you fresh lady-killer," he threatened. "We're hell on switchmen an' checkers!"

"Did you fellers call that girl over to the roundhouse?"

"Naw! She's been comin' around here fer weeks. She ain't a bad lookin' hashier."

Lark weighed his next question. "Do you know where she lives?"

"Sleeps in a box-car, I guess."

"What's her name?"

The wiper eyed the spanner. "Her name is Nan—something. Nan—oh, yes! Nan Arnold."

Lark turned from the wiper, who dropped his spanner on a pile of sand.

Black Arnold was the name Uncle Add had mentioned in connection with the former robbery on the C., M. and W. An Arnold had been sent to the penitentiary.

Lark hurried from the roundhouse. He walked across the tracks toward J. J. D.'s office. There was every possibility that the division superintendent would be hard at work. But J. J. D. would be more than interested in Nan Arnold!

the country where his heart was. The sea was good enough, and the army had shown him places that he liked well enough; but the stern-browed, granite mountains, and the clean taste of the north in his mouth were his own folks, even as were the men and women who lived on Ripley Road. This night, therefore, he walked with joy. The moon drew the mountains in black silhouette against the sky, and his spirit rose to meet the beauty of them—just as his body thrilled to the November air.

He opened the sheepskin coat that he had come by without payment of moneys, and let the night flow against the O. D. wool shirt that strained over his arched chest. The collar was unbuttoned to relieve a neck that ran straight down from the ears: it was the neck of a wrestler, and it supported a wedge-shaped jaw that had commanded respect among men of various races and conditions. Bill was not a big man, but all of him that there was had been trained and developed to be useful in the hour of battle.

Lights from every window in Papineau's rickety house spotted the night, and the capering strains of the host's fiddle danced out to meet the ears of Stark. His own steps quickened. Near the barn, full in the moonlight, he saw a man with a jug over his shoulder, drinking, and at the same time the droning, nasal voice of the "caller off" for the quadrilles came through a half-open window:

"Right hand to pardner an' left hand back, an' swing with the girl behind ye!"

Bill chuckled. It was going to be just like old times; he put his hand to the latch and stepped, blinking, into the bright, reeking kitchen and stood still by the doorway in order to get his bearings.

Time had not written any new record upon the face of Daddy Papineau: his sun-cured countenance and bony frame appeared unchanged as he sat in his splint-bottomed rocking-chair with the greasy leather cushion and scraped at the fiddle that he loved. A glass, a pitcher, and a cob pipe were forgotten upon a table at his side. All this might have been ten years ago.

Stark was glad. He had come back

searching for something eaten by a craving that he could not name. The mountains partly satisfied it; the lights, the familiar music, and the sight of old Papineau eased it. After a time he would try the cider—and that, by the unsteadiness of some of the dancers, should have enough kick to put him right.

But among those who danced and those who sat along the wall things were not unchanged. A new generation had grown up, crowding his own along toward maturity, since Stark had been in the house of Papineau, or attended a kitchen tunk, or drunk hard cider with the jug thrown over his shoulder. Young, new faces, flushed and smiling, stared at him; and the ones that he recognized seemed a little blurred by what ten years of living had done to them. He wondered if he himself were that way, like an apple that has been left just a little too long on the tree instead of being picked in all its rich freshness. The women had been round-cheeked girls when he went away, tempting to a man; and now other rounded cheeks and brighter eyes had taken their places.

Marie Delage sat in a corner, alone; she whose feet had been the lightest, and whose beaux had been unnumbered. Sozzle Howard, so known because of his resemblance in manners and physique to the pig, had ungracefully increased in bulk. Judd Dickinson, who called off through his long nose, was gray; and his wife, Betay, sat knitting instead of dancing. Knitting!

It was a trifle sad, and yet very good to the eyes of Stark. The tobacco smoke hung in layers below the blackened plaster of the ceiling: the smell of alcohol and of cheap perfume blended and struggled against the wholesome night wind—for somebody had thoughtfully opened the windows to provide ways of retreat in case of a fight. Before long the cook-stove would be thrown out of doors to make room for another "set" of dancers. At least it had been so in the old days.

"Bad Bill Stark, or I'll eat my shirt!" The words rumbled into his ear with the swelling volume of thunder, and he knew, even before he turned, that the stoop-shouldered, gorilla-like bully of Ripley

Road, Monk Grimes, was towering over him—at least Monk had been the bully, and he still looked the part as he cursed earnestly in the first heat of his welcome. A big paw gripped one of Bill's hands and refused to let it go: it was not until Monk stopped to spit that the visitor got a chance to speak.

"I'm glad to get home," he said, warmed to a smile by this reception. "There ain't no place like it!"

"You said a mouthful!" Grimes looked him over with the eye of a man trained in appraising men. "You're a lot huskier than you was, Bill!"

"Yes." Stark had his eye upon the dancing floor, which had just been cleared by the ending of the quadrille. He wanted to get a girl for the next dance—some kind of a girl. An old girl or a new girl—it didn't matter about that if only she were a real American girl from Ripley Road.

The voice of Monk Grimes was filling him with information about their old friends, but he took note, consciously, only of bits here and there: his eyes sought among the heads brown and black and yellow for some one whom he knew. Suddenly Daddy Papineau drained his glass and drew a long, warning wail from his fiddle. Judd leaped, with the sprightliness of many drinks, to the seat of a chair, and shouted above the roar of tongues.

"Take yer pardners fer the Money Musk!"

A tall, slender young fellow, whose white collar and pressed clothes proclaimed him not of the road, spun a girl to the center of the kitchen. She pirouetted in a dainty flutter of white skirts and silken ankles—her dress was one that had never known the needle of the Valley Forks dressmaker. Bad Bill sensed this difference in her attire and then let it pass into the realm of discarded thoughts: it was her uplifted face with which he had concern.

This was she—the woman. Not that she matched feature for feature his dreams; he did not then, indeed, remark the color of her eyes and hair. But from the depths of him there was a pull, gentler than a caress and stronger than the mountains, toward that girl who showed her ankles there

at Papineau's tunk. Thus it struck him, stabbing even as his heart leaped to answer the look in her face.

No other woman would ever look like that to him. He had dreamed this reality when gray seas pounded the reeling decks—when he lay face downward in the death infested mud of France. There she was.

"Gawd!" he said aloud. "She's a beauty!"

A laugh from Monk Grimes jarred him like a blow to the point of the chin. He snapped around, with the muscles about his eyes and mouth tightening.

"Well?" he questioned. Monk looked at him curiously, searchingly, and dropped a staggering hand down upon his shoulder.

"Come have a drink," he said. "They's some of the boys you use to know outside."

"I ain't drinking," answered Bill. On Ripley Road a man either drank or he didn't drink. If he did drink there could be no passing up a round, and the jug must gurgle as long as it stayed at his lips. Bill Stark knew this, and he wanted all the best that was in him to win a word with that girl.

"Hell!" Grimes spat disgustedly out of a window. "It ain't going to do you any good, for Papineau and Hurley's both after her!"

"What do you mean, Monk?"

"Say! Didn't I see your face when you was a looking at Janet McCullough?"

"You mean the girl in the fluffy dress—dancing with the white-collared guy?"

"That's Hurley—Richard Hurley. You know his pa—one of the county supervisors and deacon in the Valley Forks church!"

"Sure," answered Bill quietly; but inwardly he marveled. Had church members taken to going to tunks on Ripley Road?

"Well, this here Dick Hurley is hanging onto his job, and he still goes to church, but his folks kicked him out three months ago on account of Jan!"

It was as though she belonged to Bad Bill—in his mind she did—and he stepped in so that he could get the whole lifting power of his body under an uppercut when



the instant came to drive Monk Grimes's jaws together. Grimes must have felt something of this, and the evening had not yet reached the fighting stage.

"I dunno nothing about this myself, Bill, but they say he wants to marry her. And Daddy Papineau, he made her all kinds of offers, one way and another. I dunno much about it, Bill. You ask Sozle Howard; he knows everybody's business but his own."

"Come make me acquainted with her, Monk, after they get through this dance," said Stark, turning his attention now to the slender form that wound in and out among the others with such infinitely greater charm of movement; for Grimes had made amends.

"You don't need no interduction," growled Monk, moving away, "and besides, I got to go get me a drink."

So Bill was left standing alone to gaze at her, and think.

Had Monk really been about to speak or hint evil of her, or had he read that intent into the words of the big man? Impossible. Stark knew every tone, every look of Ripley Road faces and voices. Had ten years made him anything less of a mountain man? He felt himself growing slowly hot as a stove grows hot when the fire is kindled within: he took off his heavy coat and hung it over his arm.

Monk Grimes had better look to his tongue. Now Bad Bill remembered, or fancied he remembered, that the bully of other days had been something of a gossip. He found a place near the fiddler's chair, so that he could better watch the girl when she stood at ease during the intervals of the dance.

To Bill she was perfect; and his wanderings had made him no mean judge of women. Slender hands and feet that a princess might have owned with pride—coal-black hair and gray eyes that darkened or flashed according to her mood. Her mouth was one to be kissed in the sweetness of a summer night, to the music of gently stirring waters.

She was not beautiful as are beautiful the women whose pictures are printed for the world to admire: she was of the kind

that has set blows thudding since the beginning of the world. And in her face, that turned with a quick, warm smile toward whoever spoke to her, Bill found nothing to soil the whiteness of his worship.

When, at the end of the dance, Janet McCullough sat down with Richard Hurley beside her, Bill Stark walked across the room and halted in front of her chair. She had seen him coming. So had Hurley, and Bill had marked the look of the jealous watch-dog in his eyes.

"Miss McCullough," said Stark, standing at attention, "will you dance the next time with me?"

She looked at him curiously, not unpleasantly, and he knew that the result of her findings would determine his present fate. But Hurley fidgeted. With a sideways glance Bill placed him as much more than a cub, although as yet untried: rather, perhaps, was he in the process of being tried now.

"Janet!" exploded Hurley, "Has this man been introduced to you?"

"No, sir," answered Stark, before she could speak. Now he swung his gaze full upon the face of the younger man. "I asked a feller to introduce me, but he had to go get a drink, so I introduced myself. My name is Bill Stark."

"Bad Bill Stark!" exclaimed the girl; and her voice matched the rest of her. "I've heard of you!"

"Yes, ma'am," humbly enough; "but I stopped being bad the minute I come in here and see you dancing."

She laughed, and a sparkle of admiration came into her eyes. Hurley folded his arms furiously: it was quite plain that he was not and never would be at home on Ripley Road—that he neither understood the code nor liked the people.

"What made you stop being bad when you saw me?"

Now Bill Stark lost something of his equanimity, and turned hot with a blush. She was boldly forcing his hand: and yet he liked that sort of talk, straight from the shoulder. Not many girls talked that way.

"Because—" He swallowed, the dryness in his throat as he searched through

his limited vocabulary for words—"because I felt like—like I did once in a church in France."

This was not in the least what he had meant to say. He had intended to find some brilliant repartee, and instead this foolish and flat-sounding thing had slipped out. But it was the truth, at that, although he had not realized it until he had spoken.

"I'll dance with you, Mr. Bad Bill Stark," she murmured, without the trace of the ridicule he had feared.

Was it possible that she had put her little hand into his so that he might lead her out for the quadrille which Dickinson, now completely mellowed by cider, was bawling to the world. Yes; there her hand lay, like a flower on a blackened boulder.

He conducted her to their place, conscious that other couples in the set were whispering inquiries about him—that news of the return of Bad Bill Stark was running from ear to ear. All this was far-away, however: his world, for the time, was the space that held them. He saw the hint of anxiety fade from her eyes at his first movements for Stark, light on his feet as all good wrestlers must be, danced with effortless steps.

"You look like the cat that swallowed the canary," she laughed, after an interval during which they had remained silent amid the none too delicate chatter of the others. "I mean the cat that was glad of it afterward—not the one that was afraid of getting caught with feathers on his mouth."

"I feel like I was on top of a mountain," he replied, treating himself to a long look into her eyes.

Immediately he wondered what made him talk such stuff to-night, even if it was the truth. But it did not seem to disgust her, even though it wiped the smile from her face. She drew a deep breath, and her hand lay more warmly close in his.

"I bet you don't live on the Road," he ventured, after another little moment of silence.

"It's my best dress!" How easily her laugh rippled into the thick air of the room. "Do I look like a city girl?"

"You look—like a flower." For the

third time that evening words came from some inward reservoir, the very existence of which he had not dreamed. And now, for the first time, he began to wonder if it were not a good thing that he should speak out what he afterward found himself thinking. For she was giving him all of her attention, and the gray eyes were darkened by something which at least was not mockery.

"I'm a Ripley Roder," she said. "You'll find it out soon enough. And I know you well, Mr. Bad Bill Stark, although you don't know me. I've lived off and on with Jake Turner's folks—they're my cousins—and when I was a little girl, going to school, I used to hide over the fence if I saw Bad Bill coming."

Five seconds served to place her. She was the pig-tailed brat with the big eyes whom he had scared many a time out of pure deviltry when he was in his teens. Not that he had ever harmed a child or kicked a dog. It had been fun, then, to see her trim little legs flash over a fence: fun to see her crouching on the other side, round eyed as a kitten.

"I never meant no harm—"

"Don't I know it!" She smiled, and Bill asked himself if all the sweetness of that smile could truly be for him. "And I knew it then, deep inside of me. Maybe I liked to have Bad Bill scare me! Bad Bill—who took the sheriff's gun away from him and lived in the mountains for the next six months!"

"I told you I'd quit being Bad Bill the minute I saw—"

A raucous shout drowned his voice; and then a sea of laughter surged and beat against his bewildered ears. His head snapped up, and as his gaze left the face of Janet McCullough he understood.

The music had ceased, and old Papineau sat leaning forward and looking at them, with his fiddle across his knees. The other dancers had left the floor—the quadrille was ended, and he and the girl had been fairly caught in that most hopeless condition of spooniness; that condition in which the victims are utterly oblivious of the world about them. It was true enough of him, and it seemed to be true of the girl.

A gale of hand-clapping swept the room. Bill saw the tremendous palms of Monk Grimes come together, and guessed that the first shout had come from him; he saw the face of Richard Hurley glowering with the blackness of an almost insane jealousy. For himself, Bill Stark cared nothing, but to him it was sacrilege that such a creature as she who stood beside him should be subjected to this and the smutted jests that might follow.

Janet McCullough, however, was not perturbed; her chin had tilted upward a little, and she glanced, still smiling, at him for guidance.

"Injun wedding!" bellowed Monk Grimes. "Somebody get a broomstick!"

Bill himself saw no harm in this ancient mock ceremony, and a swift look at Janet told him that she was reconciled to the fact that they must make sport for Daddy Papineau's tunk. But in Monk Grimes he sensed the possibility of trouble. Something more powerful than hard cider had quickly put a lurch and heave in his gait, and the little following that always clusters about a leader had been with him when the hip-pockets were called upon. Yet it might go off all right, for everybody up to that moment was good natured.

Sozzle Howard and grinning Judd Dickenson held the broomstick while Grimes drew his face into what he thought, doubtless, was a look of mock solemnity for the pronouncement of the doggerel ending with "over the broomstick you must go." Stark, again with Janet's hand in his, started to back away for the run preliminary to their leap over the broomstick. She lagged briefly, to gather up her skirt in the free hand, and it may have been that Monk thought she was unwilling.

"Get a move on you, Jan!" he roared. And he made the mistake of laying his hand upon her shoulder.

Bad Bill had to overreach himself in order to land a blow as quickly as he wanted to upon the face of the giant. He was too far away to strike effectively, and he chose the face from a desire to see the blood of the man who had dared to touch her. So Grimes, instead of going down, crashed backward among the chairs along

the wall, and Bill staggered almost into the arms of the man he had struck before he could recover himself. Monk bounded back from the wall and caught Stark with a hiplock.

Bill knew that the now silent and waiting guests under Papineau's roof expected to see him lifted and thrown the length of the room. He realized this, almost smiling to himself, as his body writhed slightly and one brown sleeve went around the back of Grimes's neck and over his shoulder—the other wrist slid beneath an armpit and his hands clasped—simultaneously he curved his leg in front of Monk's and planted his foot on the outside. He had a vise-like arm-and-neck hold, and when he bore down with a sudden twist, Monk Grimes turned over his hip as upon a pivot.

The head of the bully of Ripley Road struck the floor first, bent to one side under the weight of following shoulders, and rolled limply upon the boards as his whole body settled to a clumsy inertia. For a heart-gripping instant it looked as though Monk Grimes might be dead. The room held its breath and Bill stood waiting, with an eye upon the nearest window. Then Grimes stirred and hell broke loose.

The phalanx of Monk's half-dozen immediate followers moved to take swift vengeance upon his conqueror—and they were between him and the door. Bad Bill stepped backward and lifted down from its bracket on the wall one of the oil lamps: that he hurled, flaming, at the foremost man, and saw him go down as it ricocheted from his head into the thick of the others. It halted them for the few precious seconds that Stark needed—then he went bounding, catlike, toward the door, with a fist crashing into a face at each bound. He chose the door rather than a window nearer at hand, because with the latter there was always the possibility of a sprained ankle or a broken arm.

Bill drove a straight right into the middle of Sozzle Howard and passed out of the house of Papineau. He ran across the road, vaulted a stone wall, and sat down in the shadow of some scrubby cedars. From there he saw them pour out of the building, heard the bedlam of their shouts

and curses, and knew that in less than five minutes they would have consoled themselves with Papineau's cider.

He put his head in his hands and groaned aloud. A fine mess he had made of things—all within half an hour he had seen the only girl who had made him think of a house with a baby sprawling over the floor, he had disgraced himself by starting a fight just when she seemed to take an interest in him, and he had smashed his resolution to reform before it had had time to become anything more than words. What chance would he have with her now?

He became conscious of a light touch upon his shoulder, and instantly bounded up and away. But it was the girl, standing like a dream made real in the moonlight. She laughed at him, with a little caressing sound in her throat, and moved closer to him as he stood numbed by astonishment.

"Hello, Bill!" she said. "I thought you had reformed!"

"Yes, ma'am, I have," he answered stoutly, finding words at last. "You give me a chance and you'll see! I'm going to work, and I won't get in no more fights. Not unless—unless—well, I wouldn't stand having a man put his hand on you the way Monk Grimes did!"

"Oh, Bad Bill!" she cried. "Of all the bad men I have seen, you're the best—and the funniest!"

"I didn't know I was funny." He grew a little stiff, fearing the agony of ridicule from her.

"Funny and nice. Do you mean, Honest Injun, that you're going to go to work and keep out of trouble—for me?"

"Why, sure! What for did you think I'd do it?"

Her head turned away so that he saw her profile, rare and delicate. She swayed ever so slightly. If she had been any other girl to whom he had ever made love he would have seized her then in his arms and kissed her.

◆ "Bill," she murmured at last, "I want you to do something for me."

"You bet I'll do it," he promised recklessly. "I'll do it right off—"

"I want you to go down to Valley Forks

and get a job and marry Nellie Burpee! She's the nicest girl I know of, Bill; pretty, and a good housekeeper!"

Janet McCullough melted away from him before his numbed tongue could speak. She was gone—he could not tell where—among the black shadows of the scrubs when he took a step forward and hurled after her his refusal.

"I'll be damned if I will!"

Nothing answered that cry of outrage; and slowly he cooled to the realization that he had seen the last of her for that night.

What had made her say that strange thing to him? Was she in love with Hurley, the stiff with the white collar? Bill did not believe that she could be in love with a man not quite of her own breed; and he stubbornly refused to entertain the thought that she could be moved either by Papineau's reputed dollars or the prestige of becoming a Hurley.

So it was that he was little happier than he had been immediately after the fight when he went, hatless and coatless, along the road toward the house of Grandma Persons, where he had been welcomed as a boarder the day before. Anyhow he would show Janet McCullough that he had meant what he said about going to work and keeping straight. He instinctively knew that he was a better man than Hurley—and what else could count with a girl like her? But that advice of hers, delivered just before she disappeared, still troubled him.

With daylight Bill Stark was up, and by noon he had proved himself by taking fifty cords of wood to cut. That was enough, if he stuck to it, to set him right in the township as a hard working man; and at night, after he had bought an ax and ground it, he went again to Papineau's place for the coat that might be there if no one of the guests had seen and fancied it well enough to take the risk of Bad Bill's wrath.

There was a bright light in Daddy Papineau's kitchen and, as the night was unusually warm, a window was half open. Thus it came about that Stark, walking noiselessly over the soft turf of the doorway, could both see and hear the two occupants of that room during all his progress from the tumble-down fence to the door—



step. He had to see and overhear unless he were to cover eyes and ears and shout his presence from the yard. But as the voice that answered Papineau's husky squeak was that of Janet McCullough, and the form standing in front of his rocking-chair hers, Stark had no time to think of ethical niceties.

"By dam!" came from the old man, and then his words rattled out like a patter of hail. "I tell you no once, twice, three time! Not now! Bimeby, when I die, yes!"

"Come through, you old fool!" said Janet, clearly and distinctly, "or you won't get me! Do you think I'm going to wait around and wear calico—wait for you to croak? And I don't trust you!"

"Mebbe I don't trus' you!" Daddy leaned forward in his cushioned chair. "Mebbe you play hell wit' young feller on Papineau's money? I guess not!"

"Why, Daddy!" she mocked. "You don't treat me right—considering I know just where you've got those twenties and fifties and hundreds salted away!"

Stark, standing on the doorstep, saw Papineau rise from his chair and lift the fiddle that had lain across his lap as though to bring it down over the girl's head. Bill set the door trembling with a thundrous knock and shoved it open in time to catch the tableau just as he had seen it through the window. Janet had remained where she stood, but her face was pale as she turned it toward Stark—pale and a little drawn.

"Ugh!" grunted the old man, sitting down heavily. "What for you come round here to-night?"

"I want my coat, Daddy," said Bill, "and my hat, too, if somebody else ain't wanted 'em first."

Papineau pointed silently with his bow to where coat and hat hung upon a nail. Stark slipped his arms into the sheepskin and looked at the girl, who had not yet spoken to him.

"I guess you better let me take you along as far as the Turners," he said quietly. "It's dark as a stack of black cats."

She hesitated just long enough for him to see that she did so, and with a toss of

head and fine scorn in her gray eyes for Papineau, she turned toward him.

"Yes," she agreed, "I'll go with a regular man!"

If the thrust scorned on Daddy he did not show it; and when Bill closed the door he was still sitting motionless with the fiddle in his arms. Out of the yard and for many rods along the rutted highway they walked in silence.

"Well," she said finally, from the obscurity at his side, "you heard something, I suppose?"

"Yes." He wished the moon would come up so that he could at least try to read something from her face.

"He wants me to marry him."

"I don't blame him," replied Bill. "Not at all."

"And I want his money!"

"Ye-ah?" doubtfully.

"And he knows it!"

"He don't think any more of a dollar than he does of his right arm," said Stark.

"You dummy!" she cried suddenly. Her hands grasped his coat and she tried to shake him as one shakes an obstinate child. "Don't you understand anything at all? Don't you know that I'm playing him and Hurley off against each other to see which one I can get the most out of? I'm a bad lot!"

"I know," he answered, standing rock-like with his arms at his sides, "that you ain't a bad lot."

"You don't know anything!" she murmured, and her hands relaxed their grasp.

"I've been around some," said Bill, "and I've got to admit you act like a bad lot. But you ain't. I don't believe it now, nor I won't, ever!"

Suddenly her laughter pealed into the darkness. How she lashed him with that laugh! It cross-indexed him as a fool—as a big hulk of flesh so far beneath her in the scale of mental evolution that hardly could his imagination bridge the abyss. It made him experience the apotheosis of inferiority.

"If you had—old Papineau's money," she whispered slowly, with her head bent near enough so that almost her hair brushed his face, "you'd believe it, all right."

Bill did not in the least think of himself

as being tempted. He was, as the men in his company had said, a serious-minded cuss for a rough-neck, and he was now concerned with the apparent failure of fact to live up to his theory. He grasped her by the two shoulders and held her at arm's length.

"And I'll be busted if I'd take Daddy Papineau's money to get you!" he flared. "Nor anybody else's!"

"Bad Bill Stark never took a nickel!" she sneered.

"I ain't saying what I've done," he growled. "I'm saying what I wouldn't do to get a nice girl like you!"

"I ain't a nice girl like me!" she laughed with a shrill, rising note in her voice. "And you'll find it out before you're much older—I'll get it through your thick head so you'll believe it!"

Somehow she managed to twist away from him before he could close his fingers more tightly: he heard the light patter of her running steps as they grew faint down the road. He remained where he was until there were no sounds other than those of the night, and then, with his body weighing upon him as though it were of lead, he went home.

Under Grandma Persons's home-made comfortables, Bill Stark lay and fought for the ideal which threatened to slip from him. He clung to it with frantic hands.

She just thought she was a bad lot, he told himself over and over again, because she had flirted with Hurley and Papineau some. Why, it couldn't be that a girl with eyes and a voice like that, and that look in her face, would set out to double-cross anybody. Or try to get him to stick up old Papineau. And stoutly denying to himself that he believed any such thing, he fell into a sleep of ugly dreams.

Thereafter for more than a fortnight life made Stark dance like a jumping-jack on a stick—made Bill, who had been accustomed to fiddle while life danced for him, swing up and down through the mazes of despair and hope, doubt and joy.

When he went to the Turners to see her she was never there, or just leaving for a drive with Hurley, or on her way to tantalize Daddy Papineau. But if he settled

steadily to his chopping, cursing all women and ready to believe the worst of Janet, she would appear suddenly almost within range of his flying chips and bat his spirits up to a froth of happiness by the flash and sparkle of her presence. At the end of an hour, perhaps, she would leave him with his heart pounding and his ax feather light in his hands.

He knew that something must happen and put an end to all this, but what that would be or how or when it would come he had no idea. When he tried to end it by marrying her offhand, she laughed at him. It was Janet who led fate toddling at her side; and Stark learned this early one morning, in that cold, dark hour when the chill strikes to the marrow of a man's bones. He was awakened by the scared, cracked voice of Grandma Persons below-stairs.

She spoke words neither polite nor well chosen, and many of them. Suddenly through her tirade cut the voice of Janet McCullough.

"Bill Stark!" she cried. "Get up and come down here!"

"Get out, you hussy!" shrieked Grandma Persons. "I won't have you in the house another minute, so help me Jehoshaphat!"

But as Stark's feet hit the floor and he struggled into his shirt in the dark, he knew that Janet would stay there as long as she pleased; and she did, while he took time to light a lamp and dress fully in order to be prepared for whatever might happen.

He found the girl backed against the wall, defiant and determined, while Grandma Persons danced in front of her in a frenzy of helpless rage. He noted, even then, that Janet was dressed differently—wrapped in a long, smart cape, and crowned by a tiny hat such as might be worn on a journey.

"What does this gal mean, a pounding on my door at four o'clock in the morning?" demanded grandma. "I thought when you took that wood to cut you'd turned respectable, Bill Stark!"

"Bill, I've got to catch the sleeper at the Forks," said Janet, ignoring the old

woman. "Carry my satchel down for me, will you?"

"Sure," answered Stark, as he put on his cap and coat. "Keep cool, grandma, I'll promise not to get up a four o'clock again if I live to be a hundred!"

He followed the girl out into the night with his mind little more than a question-mark—he knew that the satchel was merely an excuse, but he did not ask for any explanation. She set a pace that grew faster as their eyes became accustomed to the darkness and he noticed that her dim form took care to remain always far enough away from him to be out of arm's reach.

So they went on for a long time. The gray ghosts of the mountains began to rise in the east, and the glow of red dawn touched very faintly an overcast sky. Bill maintained now the silence of obstinacy. He would see the thing through in her way—and then he'd have his for a little while. For with his blood surging in his veins again his faith in her, lost for a moment as he tumbled out in the cold, returned: she was too high spirited, and it was up to him to take care of her.

It had grown light enough so that he could see her face as a white blur when she halted; and he realized that just ahead of them stood the dejected house of Papineau, showing the long-time niggardliness of repairs even in the semidarkness.

"Bill," she said, "I broke up your sleep to-night so it wouldn't be broken up any more after this—maybe it wouldn't, anyway, but I thought I'd prove what I said to you a while ago. Remember I said you'd believe I was a bad lot before you was much older?"

"Yes, but I don't. Not yet."

"You will, Bill. And I want you to go down to the Forks and marry Nellie Burpee, like I said." She turned, still taking care to maintain the distance between them, and with a gesture led the way along the shelter of a brush-grown fence and up to one side of Papineau's house.

"I've got Daddy's roll, Bill, and it's a big one!" She stood poised, with her attention equally upon the house and upon him. Her voice was toned down almost to a whisper. "It's where he won't see it

again, and I'm going to take a train out of here this morning. He couldn't prove anything on me if he tried—but he'll never let on that he's lost anything. I know him. And now you know me, Bill. I'm no good; but if I've jolted you into going to work and being a regular feller, I'm glad of it. And I guess I have."

"What—" Bill Stark struggled with a dryness in his mouth. "I don't believe it—but what did you bring me here for, anyway?"

"Yes, you do believe it!" she triumphed, and he knew that she spoke the truth. "But that's what I thought you'd say, and that's why I brought you here—I could have beat it out of town and said nothing, but I wanted you to see Daddy Papineau come down-stairs and look for his money, just as he does every morning, and find it gone. Oh, Bill! I've got you all sewed up! In ten minutes you won't think any more of me than you do of a dirty, mean dog!"

Again she moved forward, before he could find words to reply, and he walked after her mechanically. He felt now as he had when he learned to swim; he was in a medium that choked him, that pulled him down, that stifled thought and action. A spiritual medium this, and one that threatened spiritual death just as that other had threatened physical death. He must strike out.

She beckoned him to her side. Crouching under a window, her hat off and her eyes raised just above the level of the sill, she whispered:

"Promise not to stop me when I get ready to go?"

"I promise," he said, and took his place beside her.

"He gets up at the first peep of daylight," she explained, and pointed into the room where a lamp, turned low, burned upon a table. "He keeps a light all night so he'll have the advantage if anybody breaks in—and the first thing he does when he comes down in the morning is to see if his money's safe. I stayed under this window from dark till daylight a week ago to find out where he kept it hid. See? That's what he had it hid in—there on the floor

by the table. And he didn't believe I knew—not even when I told him!”

The greasy leather cushion from Papineau's rocking-chair lay by one of the table legs, with a slit in one side and the stuffing spilling out. Bill Stark let out his breath with a groan.

“What did you do it for, girl?” he whispered.

“Oh, it'll give me a start toward something!” She kept her gaze fixed upon the open stairway that led down into the kitchen. “I've always been hungry for—”

That sentence was not finished, for upon the stairway which they were both watching appeared a pair of bare feet, walking slowly backward. Daddy Papineau, with one suspender hanging and his face raised to something above him, groped his way down. Another pair of feet, well-shod, appeared. Then came the tall form of Richard Hurley, timing his steps to those of the old man and holding a pistol leveled at his head.

“Now get it!” commanded Hurley, in a voice that shook with the tremor of intense emotion. “And be damned quick about it! I've fooled long enough!”

“Aw right,” agreed Papineau, as steadily as though he were agreeing to play another tune for a roomful of dancers. “I guess I better be alive den not and have it, hey?”

He backed across the room, his hand reached behind him for the rocking-chair, and at the same instant his foot struck against the cushion on the floor. He became rigid. His head bent and he looked down.

“By dam!” he chuckled. “I guess Bad Bill or de girl got dere first!”

“What do you mean?” Hurley bounded across the room and jammed the muzzle of his pistol against Papineau's breast. With his free hand he snatched out his watch and held it in trembling fingers. “I'll give you a minute, you old fool, and then I'll blow your heart out if I don't get that money!”

Bill Stark, held as in a vise until then by what he had seen, took swift thought as to what he could do to prevent that murder. For Richard Hurley would shoot.

He was too nearly insane with desire for the money which he believed would win him Janet, too scared at his first crime, to reckon consequences. Stark had seen men like that before. The movement of a finger, a quick breath from Papineau, would bring death.

There was one chance, and Bill drew back his arm to take it. He would plunge a fist through one of the panes of glass and it might be that he could draw the nervous fire of Hurley. If he could do that, perhaps the amateur criminal would break and run. He raised up, with fist clenched, glimpsing out of the corner of his eye that Janet was no longer beside him. So she'd gone, and left three men to play pass-in-the-corner with death!

He struck, and a crash of splintered glass, a pistol shot, and a woman's cry of pain filled his ears together. That cry was Janet's, and it had come from within the room. He hurried himself around the corner of the house and cleared the steps with a stride. The door was swinging open. The smell of burnt powder met him; the staring white face of Hurley; and the pistol held in a limp hand.

Old Papineau stood by the table, exactly where he had been, and unharmed. But Janet was down on the floor, holding herself up with one hand while the other pressed against her side. Her eyes were upon Hurley, with the surprise of a child that meets an unexpected blow, but they turned to Stark as he leaped through the doorway.

“Bill,” she said, in a very small voice, “I guess I'm hurt!”

Stark dropped to his knees, heedless of the other men. But there was no need to fear the unnerved Hurley now, and no need to fear Daddy Papineau, for he was a canny person.

“My girl!” Bill cradled her close to his sheepskin jacket, and did something that he had not done at least within his memory. Not even when they lashed him with a cat o' nine tails in school had he wept; but now he was shaken by the strangeness of sobs, and the face of Janet became dim through his tears.

“I'll get a doctor!” croaked Hurley,



taking an uncertain step forward. "My God! I'll go for a doctor!"

"Take Papineau's horse!" Stark flung at him. "And be quick about it!"

Janet was smiling up into Bill's face with the happiness of a lost child come home.

"There's Daddy's money," she whispered, and at a movement of her arm a hand-bag dropped from a fold of the cape. "I'm no good—not even a good crook, Bill. You believed in me—"

Bill Stark brushed the hand-bag aside, and into the clutching hands of Papineau, as he worked clumsily at her waist where it had grown wet to the touch. He had seen wounds, many of them, and of various kinds, and the sight of this one gave him courage to smile through the mist that dimmed his eyes.

"You believed in me, Bill," she breathed—"and I had to live up to you!"

"Good or bad," he growled softly, "you're my girl, Jan!"

## MAGELLAN IN THE STRAITS

BY SARAH N. CLEGHORN

THE steady wind blew west  
 Along the tortuous strait;  
 And still the lean and scowling crew,  
 Consumed with helpless hate,  
 Beheld Magellan smile  
 As if he joked with fate.

All day they cursed the ship;  
 All night they dreamed of Spain.  
 They called the strait a river of hell—  
 He swore it was the main;  
 For oft at eve he dipped  
 And found it salt again.

The sailors sickened fast;  
 Their eyes began to stare.  
 Now, wolflike ravening, from the mast  
 The leathern thongs they tear;  
 For none of their small lives  
 Did that great captain care.

At even and at morn  
 He bade their labors halt,  
 To swing some luckier comrade down  
 Into the foaming vault;  
 And still he smiled and said:  
 "The water still is salt!"

The water still was salt;  
 The west wind still blew free—  
 Sudden the sailors crowding ran  
 From starboard and from lee,  
 And lifted up their eyes  
 Upon the western sea.

# Jungle Love

## by Raymond Lester

Author of "Dust to Dust," "Walls of Clay," the *Non Russell* series, etc.

### PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

**J**ULIE SOMERS, a twelve-dollar-a-week stenographer, without family ties, had been bowled over by the dismal prospect the future held for her. Also, the clothes and the example of Miss Blonde in her office had subconsciously influenced Julie's decision to seize opportunity. At Fourteenth Street the girl came face to face with opportunity, yclept Artie Falwell, a smart and dapper young man in externals, but inwardly a kiss-and-run-away roué in his lighter moments, a crook all the time. In one look he appraised Julie and invited her to go to the Mogolia for a bit of supper. To the girl the place spelled fairyland, in reality it was a hotel run by rogues for rogues.

Cocktails, dinner, jazz, and Artie's artful insinuations followed. Julie was a willing butterfly on the wheel. When a woman's fur touched her arm in passing, the girl suddenly declared she must go home. Artie first filched her money from her hand-bag and then willingly acceded. As soon as the girl reached her room she groped under the bed and called: "Kitty, kitty." Her pet was gone, and when she opened her bag she discovered her money had disappeared as well.

Artie returned to the Mogolia and was not disappointed of his expectation. His friend Sid, a human harpy, shortly appeared on the scene and agreed to look over Artie's latest bit of fluff.

Then a woman called Leila, who had watched Artie's initiation of Julie into the Mog game, decided to save Julie. She appealed first to any latent decency in Artie. Then she tried to bribe him, knowing his kind are only reached through money. Finally, she told him if he brought Julie to any harm he would answer to her. Then she returned to the guise of a Mog woman.

For upward of an hour Artie sat planning.

### CHAPTER VIII.

#### LOANED A TWO-DOLLAR BILL.

**T**HE night, solacing friend of the calm-minded and disturbing foe of the backslider and crawfish tilter at self-respect, found Julie a prey to misery. At intervals, she sank into fretful, nightmare-weighted sleep only to wake again and again nervously unbalanced and incapable of holding herself to any hopeful views.

A changing train of thoughts leaped at her, jostled, jammed, flamed, sputtered and smoldered. A milling mob of futilities mocked at her. Her mental condition was pitiable and inevitable. The only difference between Julie and a legion of other twisters of their own minds, lay in the fact that the birds of evil omen had descended upon her sooner than in general. Trouble and misfortune arising from false steps are often long delayed in their coming, but they ar-

rive. Regret peeked at her and fluttered away. Indefinable fear swooped and tore at her quivering courage. Despair hopped around and cawed derisively. The rustle of unclean things surrounded her—nibbling, clawing.

The experience may be termed a phantasy, a wraith-inferno of her mind. Yet—it was real. Unseizable, but oppressing and of crushing weight, and the walls of her room were no barriers to the gnomes of thought that flocked to her from others. Chemically expressed, though atoms are active molecular agents seeking expression. Benign and malign they flow to the minds that will nurse them to multiplication and give them birth in deeds. In the dark hours when the million minds of the worthy-striving are dormant and inert, the sleepless, undefeatable and weak-willed are a prey to the thought waves of the wicked. The pulse of good mental vibrations is at a low

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ebb, the ether is free to the eager roaming discharge from the broodings of the plotting murderer and the scheming destroyers of peace and love and happiness. In the citadels of the kind and the pure, the wandering evil thoughts of others cannot find entry. They peep, throng around; but soon disperse.

The obvious circumstance that had torn loose Julie's frail hold on her mentality was the loss of her money. To her it was a great blow, and considered comparatively, it was. The fourteen dollars was all she had. But no material loss is irreparable. The man who loses a fortune does not necessarily lose his happiness. The woman whose youth is fading still has the beauty of her character to mature, her girl-heart to preserve from all corroding influences due to thinking herself old. The numbered years are numerically misleading. There are boys of sixty plus, and old women of seventeen minus who have deliberately thrown away their youth. Take your choice, your age is not told by your birth-certificate, nor is it what you think you are; it is what you will your mind to be.

We go beyond our Julie here. She had no will to speak of, no perception of herself as a self-governing being. Had she been told that she could not do as she liked regardless of consequences, and get away with it, she would certainly have tilted her chin and retorted that after office hours she was her own mistress. A charming but wofully misleading belief, and leading to the interpretation of individual free will as an agency freeing one from all restrictions. The act of doing the thing one has to do is no test or evidence of will power. The rules of business necessitated Julie getting to the office at a certain hour and doing a required amount of work before she left in the evening. If she did not fulfil these conditions, she knew she would be fired.

After office hours her choice of occupation was open, and provided she did what was comfortable with her idea of the fitting, she might have no great sense of elation; but on the other hand, she could not lay herself open to regretful aftermaths. Her meeting with Artie and her acceptance of his company had been one of those

things which she knew was not exactly nice. She had taken a chance, and now, although she did not connect Artie with the loss of her money, she not illogically agreed that if she had not gone to the Mog she would not now be penniless. Also, there was her kitten. If she had come straight back to her room, and found it missing, she would at least have had the satisfaction of facing her landlady and demanding an explanation. Now, the rent was due, she had no money to pay it, she knew she had done wrong in being out so late and her head was aching. The excitement of unaccustomed stimulation had died down and left her physically flat. She was in a condition of non-resistance to all ills, receptive to germs eager to take lodging in her blood and mind. Worry is the fertilizer of disease.

At last came the dawn; slowly the chill air turned warmer, the sunlight grew stronger, and the shades, fancies and shadow realities of the night receded. It was Sunday morning.

The first thing Julie did was to get out of bed and look at herself in the mirror.

The glass of these reflectors of ourselves varies in its capacity for truthful duplication. Some are of faintly pinkish tint, others tend to an indistinguishable green. In the former we look healthier, rosier than we are; in the latter, paler and sallower than is the real color of our skin. Then, too, if we feel well we look, to ourselves, better than we are. If we feel down in the dumps, blue and miserable, the rosiest of mirrors holds a wan-looking stranger.

The drawn face that Julie saw did not please or help her. Her hair was bedraggled, her cheeks seemed to be thinner and her skin looked actually dirty. Her eyelids were carmine-pink rimmed, the long, dark lashes were stuck together and the blue of her irises seemed faded to a streaky, pale gray.

The sight of her wobegone features roused her. She was appalled; but the effect brought about was the wakening of her combativeness. That pretty face of hers was too good, too valued a possession to be allowed to continue in that horrible state. She splashed some water into the

basin and sluiced her face and neck. Cold water, soap and a brisk three minutes with a towel and she not only looked better, but, more important still, she felt better. She was better.

The immediate effect was a recantation of the vague resolves she had formed during the night. She had told herself that she would never see Artie Falwell again. That she would not go to the Mog. That—well, there was a company of good thoughts that directly she felt her buoyancy returning, went into the discard.

Naturally, her position had not altered; she was still without money, still a bit shaken in her nervous system; but her view-point had shifted toward the cardinal point of self-excuse and self-pity. A great old kidder is self-pity. By this drummer of the mind we can sell ourselves all sorts of snaring excuses. Reason is counterfeited, and deliberately falsified views are adapted to the desires.

Julie had no breakfast and there was a taste a great deal nastier than a young girl should have in her mouth; but by nine o'clock she had fully equipped herself with defense against any left over doubts and troubles of her mind. After all—was it not a ridiculous idea to even think of breaking her date with Artie for that evening? At least she would get something to eat and pass the time away pleasantly. Of course she would not think of borrowing any money from him. That would be a dreadful thing to do, but if he liked to spend five or ten dollars on her. Why not? And what a silly thing it was to have thought of telling her landlady she had had her money stolen by some slick pick-pocket. Would that old woman feel sorry for her and lend her a dollar or two until next Friday? Of course not. Landladies have no heart. All they want is their room rent.

"And here she is for it," murmured Julie to herself when, an hour later, a tap came at her door. "Come," she called and sat on the edge of her bed prepared to act on the defensive.

"You know the rules of the house, don't you?" said Mrs. Bruce when she came in. "I don't allow no animals."

"Sure. That's right, but it was only a little kitten. Poor little thing. I found it. Half starved. Anyway, I don't care now. You've turned it out and that's an end of it."

"All right, but don't do it again. The rules has got to be obeyed. I ain't got no time to 'tend to starving cats or dogs. Bad enough as it is to clean up and no help to be got for love nor money."

Julie's lip curled a little as she looked at her landlady's broad, rather expressionless face. It was only natural that a woman like her would turn a poor little kitten out. Nothing else could be expected.

Quite as an aside, it may be mentioned that at that particular moment, the kitten was snugly curled up on the seat of Mrs. Bruce's favorite chair. Lots of people who are supposed to be grumpy and heartless, are obliged, in self-defense, to put up a forbidding "front." It is only necessary to imagine what would happen if twenty-five or thirty roomers all kept cats and dogs.

Mrs. Bruce backed toward the door.

"It's a nice morning," she observed. "Going out? A breath of fresh air would do you good. You look kinda pale to me. Being shut up in a' office all week, that's what does it."

Julie nodded. "I s'pose so," she agreed. "I do feel a bit tired. Went to a show last night—with a girl from the office."

"Yes—you was late, wasn't you? I heard you come in. Thought maybe you'd come down as usual, though."

"Sorry," said Julie with a curt, defiant note in her voice. "I'll have to pay you next week. I—lost all my money. Every cent. Stolen out of my bag. You don't have to worry, though. I've always paid regular, and you'll get it next Sat'day."

Offensiveness gives offense. Like Simon the Cellarer, Mrs. Bruce may have kept a good store by her. She may have had some of the unamiable traits of her class. She may have had a leaning for talking of the days when her poor husband was alive. She may have been tart and blunt, and she was certainly not very pleasing to look upon. Her clothes were untidy, her hands, red and work-marred. She had a skeptical eye. Yet, all this did not dull her ear, or



render her tame to being treated in any off-hand, near-insulting manner by any of her roomers.

Mrs. Bruce did not know that Julie was lying about the way in which she had spent Saturday evening. She did not doubt that the girl had really been victimized; but she did know that she was being spoken to in a fashion unfitting her position and the circumstances. She was not to be blamed if her sympathy was alienated. Julie, by reason of the bluff she was putting up, had overgaged her power and had taken upon herself too low an estimate of her landlady's character. Deceit is a thief of likeableness.

It was some time before Mrs. Bruce spoke. Her steady gaze traveled up and down the girl seated on the bed. She noted the careless way Julie's clothes were scattered about and—she sniffed. Whether she caught a whiff of tobacco-smoke or the spirituous vapors from the Mog still clinging to Julie's apparel, she did not know; but she could smell a rat. There was something about the girl that was not quite straight.

The landlady sighed. She felt she had reason to be angry, yet not being able to define that reason beyond Julie's way of speaking to her, she let sorrow for the girl's loss rule her judgment.

"You ain't got no money at all?" she asked.

"I just told you. Not a cent. I'll pay you next Sat'day."

"No means of gettin' no breakfast or nothing?"

"I don't care. I'm going out—to a girl's house this evening. I guess I'll be all right Monday morning. I'll be able to get enough to go through this week. I ain't lost my job."

Puzzled by the peculiar standoffishness of Julie's behavior, Mrs. Bruce left the room. Down in the basement she potted about a bit; picking things up and putting them down again in the same place.

"Kitty," she said, stroking Julie's waif, "that girl ain't actin' right somehow. It ain't no good a talking though. She's like the rest of the young ones. Stuck on herself. No breakfast! You've had

years, and I've had mine, I guess we'll fix her up something even if she is fresh."

When in response to a sharp knock, Julie opened her door, Mrs. Bruce was halfway down the stairs again. On the floor was a tray. Coffee, bread and butter and two fried eggs. Folded under the salt-cellar was a two-dollar bill.

As she stooped to pick up the tray, something limpid, owing its origin to quick shame and gratitude, came out of a big blue eye and ran down Julie's nose. It fell—in the coffee.

## CHAPTER IX.

### ONE WHO STOOD STARING.

**I**N the jumble of surface-sown and bed-rock rooted love, or what passes for love, is a factor of varying and often unknown quantity. Sometimes it burrows and undermines, at others it admirably shapes and builds.

Julie, be it said, had never, as the saying goes, fallen in love. Artie did not know the meaning of the word in any approach to its most light form. An utterly selfish man cannot love. Love means self-sacrifice, which is distinct from self-injury. Leila had known love, still loved for that matter; but the object of her love had so shamed her love that she had buried it deep. The wound in her heart had been cauterized. Her life had been such that cannot bear cataloging; but true love never dies, so she lived and—suffered. The knowledge that she had preferred to wallow in the pit rather than strive to rehabilitate herself did not make her position any easier to bear.

There was one other, although not yet mentioned more than *en passant*, who figures in the orbit of Julie's affairs, and who, until now, thought he loved.

He it was who, when Julie looked back over her shoulder, had stood staring.

In these words may be given an indication of Ernest Kennedy's attitude to the unusual: he stared. Where another man would have jumped forward, or turned on his heel, Kennedy was struck motionless. Given the same set of circumstances, differ-

ent men behave differently. Their feelings may have great resemblance, but their reflexes differ.

As capable of feelings as strong as the next man of average, humdrum, go-easy temperament, Ernest Kennedy was—slow. Not in perception, so much as in proof-seeking.

He had the not uncommon male habit of mulling over a self-evident truth and wasting time on checking up on his definite conclusion. He would know for a positive fact that he had so much money in his pocket; yet he would count it over and over again, not for the purpose of seeing if he had made a mistake or lost any, but out of sheer pleasure of checking. He loved to make little ticks against the items on his mental tablet of memoranda.

Kennedy clerked in an office in the same building as Julie. They had lunched together a few times. He had taken her to movie shows, evening walks and one or two Sunday jaunts.

There had been no avowal of love from him; but he had plodded slowly to a belief in himself as Julie's "steady."

This "steady" business is a curious cross between an engagement and a non-engagement. It is a blind kind of understanding that enables either one of the "going-together" parties to break off without any tangible show of lack of loyalty. It is a test of mental suitability, and in some cases works all right. In others the trial is all one side and the fooling on the other. One is in earnest and the other is only pretending.

Such had been the case with Ernest Kennedy and Julie, and had she been sincere, the affair might have developed to a regular, solitaire affianceship and a real, life partnership. Not very romantic maybe, but real.

In most cases these tentative heart skirmishes and amorous tryouts turn out satisfactorily, and whether the wooing pair determine to wed or part there is no great damage done. When love comes, it is not one of those spontaneous conflagrations, but is usually of a grade of mutual liking founded on a tolerable work-a-day basis.

We rave over the spectacular episodes

of the figurines in remote history. The cooing but not always pure and thoroughbred doves of the poets are perched in a jeweled and gilded niche in our regard; yet, although we may smile with indulgence tinged with a nasty streak of self-conscious superiority, it is quite probable that John and Mary of the nest habit, so commonplace, y'know, so ordinary and prosaic, have a steadfast hold on the core of things. Their galleon of adventure is mayhap an excursion steamer from a city pier to some holiday resort on the coast. The palace of their desire is a pay-as-you-must apartment that will rentally squeeze into the limits of John's salary. Their pearl-set and golden throne in Arcadia is a park bench; damp, splintery, scratched and indented with alphabetic oddities and wobbly symbols skewered with darts. So crude, so disfiguring to a primly designed and chaste park bench. On smooth trunks, too, we see these quaint pocket-knife intaglios in evidence of cupid's thrall, and sometimes they shame a noble tree; but, there are others who carve their names on the records of correspondents and divorcees.

These are mostly the gaudy-plumaged, jazz-birds of cheap passions who make love a squeaky toy. John and Mary dream of practical things such as real Wilton carpets, a kitchen cabinet and roast chicken *à deux* on Sundays, and they come pretty near to grasping perfect, undisturbed happiness. Their lamp burns steadily. Those others, the snobs of bubble-born allurements, they dream of pampered joys, grab all they can and—not caring who suffers so long as they get clear of the mess with a whole skin, they go—bust. In the name of love is much abomination hatched. With love can the fallen rise, and the great be humble.

On Saturday evening, it had been Kennedy's intention to meet Julie and tell her of a good many ideas he had been stewing over and allowing to simmer in his mind. The Artie episode had caught him unawares, and the comfortable little nest of thoughts he had prepared were thrown topsyturvy. Dumfounded, he went home and from a state of surprised indignation passed to a stage of desire to know more.

Who was that smartly dressed guy? He didn't look as if he worked for a living. Was he some rich dude? Had Julie met him before? The way she had smiled, and their manner of going off together seemed to suggest, moreover, a previous acquaintanceship.

Until late in the evening these questions bothered Ernest and cropped in between thoughts of his own disillusionment. True, he had never spoken of an engagement, or even directly suggested to Julie the possibilities that lay in the future. The code of articulation in the male "steady" is often rather obscure and oblique. He confines himself to generalities, but—

"A girl ought to know when a feller means business," reflected Ernest crossly. "She hadn't no right to let me down like that. I won't stand for it. I'm done."

So did Ernest decide offhand. On reflection, the memory of Julie's blue eyes, her neat, sprightly little figure, her quick laugh, caused him to amend his decision.

"First of all I'll find out about that chap," he determined. "Maybe he was just some masher she picked up with."

With the intention of discovering what he might, Kennedy called at Julie's rooming-house.

Mrs. Bruce none too amiably informed him that Miss Somers was not in. Vaguely disturbed, the young man lingered about the street and finally took up a permanent position in a convenient doorway at the corner. The hours went by, but his resolve to stick it out and have a word with the girl became more fixed.

When he saw her jump out of a taxi, and saw the same smartly dressed man who had met her at the "L" gaily wave his hand to her, Ernest could not make up his mind to show himself until the man in the taxi had gone.

Kennedy was not afraid of any physical trouble, but he was distinctly scared of being laughed at.

For reasons of his own, Artie had not told the chauffeur to drive on until Julie had mounted the stoop and gone in. Then, with the location of her house fixed in his mind, Artie went off. It was then too late for Ernest Kennedy to do anything. Too

late to call at the house. Too late for all kinds of things that had not entered his mind at the time.

Ernest went back to his room and spent a couple of hours proving himself wrong and a slow coach. However, he slept well, and Sunday morning went for a walk. After lunch he took another walk. Sunday evening found him in the place he had, on and off, been near all day: the corner of Julie's street.

At seven o'clock she came out, and again a false sense of self consciousness thwarted Ernest Kennedy's preconceived intentions. He had pictured the meeting, arranged in his mind how he would meet Julie, what he would say, and how he would convey to her his opinion that he had not been treated quite fairly. He would wait until she reached the corner and then—

Before then Artie rounded the corner and met Julie fifty paces from where Kennedy stood.

Now there is not the least doubt, if Ernest had been able to correctly read Artie, he would have stepped up, and the tropical bird of the broken melody would never have had the girl for audience; but although the girl's self-styled "steady" had no good opinion of the smartly tailored Artie, he was far from getting anywhere near the actual truth. But although, figuratively and literally, he stood back, Ernest was piqued with a desire to know more, and when Artie and Julie walked up the avenue, talking with apparent unconsciousness of his existence, Ernest Kennedy followed them.

Artie did not know they were being followed; but Julie, well, a girl does not have any friendly relationship with a young man without being aware when he is within sight; but as has been said, she had been pretending that she liked Ernest's company, and now she had found some one who interested her to a greater degree, she did not feel at all embarrassed by any feeling of regret for Kennedy.

In her mind she had summed him up as being "a decent kind of a feller, but stodgy and rather stupid." To this extent she was entitled to her opinions, but Ernest was something more than a rather tamely sub-

missive, discarded steady. The current of his love for Julie did not flow very deeply; but a certain chivalrous instinct lay quiescent within him that was to link up surprisingly with the near future of Julie's chain of circumstance.

In the person of Artie Falwell was the cause, and the cue to Ernest's part was to come from a woman whom he had never seen or heard of.

Just as man cannot create anything, either material or abstract, that has no past cause or future effect, so are there no events that happen of themselves. The imaginative poem is the outcome of thoughts accumulated in more or less balanced relationship.

So designated: inspiration, the thought from nowhere sort of possession, is but an untrailed mental production. The seed was there but we didn't know it. Man can move mountains and molecules, but neither in matter or mind does he originate anything from nothing. He is the product of matter. A chemical agglomeration. The soul itself is but matter so refined that it is beyond the actual seizure of our more cellularly gross senses.

The train-collision is but the ordered and orderly fruition of a combination of accidents that could only result in what we call an accident. According to the number of times the coin spins, it falls head or tail. So-called good or bad luck is only a demonstration of our failure to predetermine, foresee, and prejudice with mathematical certainty of accuracy. Coincidence, considered as an event having no relationship with analytical cause and effect, is a *façon de parler*, a myth, founded only on our inability to follow secret and hidden streams of coursing, never inert, cause and effect.

A mixture of motives caused Kennedy to follow Julie and Artie, but although we are nearly always interested in the why and wherefore of other's actions, we often do not stop to closely examine or analyze our own reasons for doing a certain thing. After we have committed ourselves, for good or ill, we wonder how we acted so well or so precipitately. Ernest followed and postponed definitions for future con-

sideration. To the entrance of the Mongolia he kept behind the pair, and there—Leila tried to make good her warning threat.

## CHAPTER X.

"THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING ERNEST"—  
KENNEDY.

AT one moment our affairs seem to be well ordered, neatly tabulated, and flowing easily and without an apparent need of our supervision. Then, with no warning, no sizzle from the soldering fire of events hidden from our sight, comes the explosion.

Leila had given Artie warning concerning his connection with Julie. Artie had gone ahead with his predetermined plans and taken steps to counteract any more that he thought Leila might make.

On Sunday morning Artie had had a confidential chat with Sid. This physically phlegmatic but mentally nimble creature of crafty ways had broadly expressed his opinion of Leila.

"Most of it was a lotta hot air," he had said. "She won't do nothing. She's one of the bunch, and if she butts in on any of my li'l' affairs, I can tie her up so tight she'll have to quit. There's ways, you know that. You didn't handle her properly. There's the trouble. You should have called her bluff and handed her the K. O. She got you scared and she knew it. By now I reckon she's cooled off, but we won't take no chances. I'll be around t'-night."

According to Julie's view of things, everything was as it should be. Of course there was Ernest. She knew he was following them; but since he had not, up to the moment they drew near to the Mog entrance, made any move, she imagined that he would there abandon his self-elected task of shadowing her.

This is probably what would have happened, but there was Sid and—Leila. Twenty-four hours ago these two had not been aware of Julie's existence. Now they were directing agents of her future. Miss Blonde was responsible for a great deal more than she could ever dream of. She



it was who had dropped the seed of evil into Julie's mind.

Having assured himself that Leila was nowhere in the café, Sid stood outside the Mog. He saw Artie and the girl coming, but no sign of Leila. Some little distance farther down the street he noted a young man, but paid no attention to him. He regarded Ernest Kennedy as some chance pedestrian. Therefore everything was O. K. Leila had climbed down. But, the thing Sid did not observe was a taxi that had been stationed at the curb across the street.

Immediately Julie and Artie had appeared the driver had started his engine, but another car had come along at the moment he was turning out. The taxi had to stop, and by the time it got going again, the girl and her escort were close to the Mog.

Not ten paces from Sid the taxi stopped with a jerk. The door was flung open and out jumped Leila. She made straight for Julie and clutched her arm.

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't be afraid of me—come—"

The very thing Leila was anxious to avoid happened. Julie drew back, and the next instant the bulk of Sid interposed between the woman and the girl. Sid laughed with throaty, genial ease, and gave Julie a gentle push toward the Mog door.

"It's all right," he said. "I'm a friend of Art's here. This woman don't mean no harm, she's a bit gone up here." He tapped his forehead significantly, and at the same moment his big left hand reached behind him, crushed Leila's arm in a swinging grip and flung her sidewise. She reeled, and to save herself from falling clutched at the unconsidered stranger's arm.

Acting under the urge of the superior tactician, Artie quickly led the girl up the Mog steps, and Sid followed.

All that was left of the affair was an in-curious, blasé chauffeur, a much startled Ernest, and a woman impotently and dumbly raging.

Leila had done what she could and failed. To attempt to follow Julie and try and warn her again was useless. The Mog was a house for fools, spenders and rogues, not for trouble-makers and disturbers of

the sheltered ways of vice. Leila knew she would not be allowed to set foot inside the lobby. There were square-shouldered prototypes of Hamfist, who would think no more of throwing a troublesome woman into the street than they would of kicking a stray dog. The rules of the underworld are self protective, rigid, and brutal. A strayer from the black flock is bound to be set upon by the rest of the herd. The mauling inflicted often ends in another murder mystery.

Leila sighed and moved toward the taxi.

Ernest eyed her with the aloof eye of the *unco guid*; but he could not forbear a question.

"You know that girl?" he asked.

Leila turned.

"Do you?" she fired back.

"Y-yes. A little."

The woman's eyes narrowed. "You were following her," she said. "What kind of a fellow are you? Why didn't you step up and wallop that big fat hog? You saw what he did. You must have done. Now they've got her."

"She was willing enough to go."

"Sure she was. The poor boob."

"She won't come to much harm."

Leila scrutinized the young man with searching, wide-open eyes.

"Are you," she asked, "just plain ignorant, a hick, or are you a sawny saphead? That's the Mog. The Mogolia ho-tel. Ain't that enough for you?"

Ernest flushed. "I'll see what I can do," he muttered, and made a move toward the entrance.

Leila touched his arm.

"Take my tip," she said. "Don't try to start something you can't finish. They're watching us now from behind those doors, and your chance of pulling off the brave rescue stuff has fizzled out. It's gone."

"The police then?"

Leila laughed bitterly. "What's the charge?" she asked. "We can't prove a thing. Men want proof before they'll move. A woman—she's different. She don't always wait for things to happen. There is one woman who can do things. If you'll help."

"You?"

Leila shrugged her shoulders.

"No, not me. I've done all I can. I'm speaking of a good woman. You have heard of her; she's Mrs. Ruth Gordon. But we can't stand here. Will you come with me? I know a quiet, respectable restaurant where we can talk. There's no time to lose. Will you come? I want your advice."

The strength of the will-purpose behind Leila's words was enough to influence any man; but it was really the last few words that moved Ernest from his rut of slow pondering before acting. Leila had asked his advice.

As may be supposed, Leila needed no advice from Ernest; but she put it that way and thus obtained his help. The end justified the means.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A LA MOG MODE.

AT a scowl and a whispered word from Sid, Artie ushered Julie, not to the café, but to the elevator.

"Going to fix you a nice little surprise party," explained the young man. "Got one or two things to see to, though. You can wait up-stairs."

"Who—what did that woman want?" asked the girl when Artie led her down a long corridor and into a large room.

"Oh, nothing. She's crazy. That's all. Forget it. In a minute or two I'll have a waiter bring you a cocktail. I won't be gone long."

Leaving the girl seated on a couch, Artie closed the door.

For five, ten, fifteen minutes, Julie was occupied in looking about her. She had no experience of hotel apartments, but this room certainly looked peculiar to her. It seemed to be half dismantled. There was dust everywhere, and the furniture was scattered about in disorder.

After a while she walked about examining things with a curious eye. She found an odd-looking table with a tarnished, sunken disk set in the center. All around the wheel were funny little red-and-black compartments. Scattered about on a buffet

were piles of unopened packs of playing-cards, and boxes of colored counters.

Then she found something else. It was a paper-bound, soiled, dog-eared book. She picked it up, turned a page, and dropped it as if she had been stung.

In some human products there is great beauty, in others there are several degrees of beastliness; but the palm for super-degradedness and sneaky viciousness shall be awarded to the wielders of the leprous pen and brush. With facile, lewd word, and slick, decadent drawing they paint the bawd and spawn tales and pictures of garlanded vice. These cooties, authors of cellar-hid, abominable printing, drip and exude poisonous corruptions and for a few easy dollars betray and besmirch the clean minds of the unwary curious. These loathsome publicists of the unclean, shelter under the cloak of anonymity, while a thousand all too easy credulous victims of their teachings tiptoe to adventures in avenues they would never otherwise have dreamed of. Even if they resist the contagion of the defiling pages the stain on their thoughts is sometimes long in being eradicated.

But the creature responsible for the abomination, Julie found, had overstepped the bounds. The concoction was too crude, too lacking, happily, in insidiousness for the girl to do other than close the book at once. She was untaught, untutored in vice or in the finer perception of refined virtue; but she experienced instant repugnance. With a sudden gesture of disgust she again picked up the book and flung it aside. It dropped to the carpet and went sliding under the couch.

This event caused a break in Julie's patience. Realization at last came to her that all was not so gayly harmless, and there was an unpleasant underside to the fun of being a sport. Knowing that she was taking a chance, she had dallied with tempting, thinly veiled, forbidden pleasures. Now the thought occurred to her that she had perhaps taken a step too far; ventured deeper than she had intended.

She went to the door. She would go and look for Artie. He was all right. A nice chap and—

At this juncture Julie stopped thinking. She could not open the door.

"I'm locked in!"

Unconscious that she uttered the words aloud, Julie stood staring at the door. She knew from the pictures she had seen passing over the screen what other girls did under like circumstances in the pictures. Some beat their clenched fists against the unyielding door panels and screamed for help. Some clutched at breast and throat, and following a spasm of terror-stricken, futile panic, crumpled helplessly on the floor.

It was no uncommon incident for a girl to be locked in a room, the only thing about it was the fact that it was a new, unsettling experience for Julie. It was unpleasant. There was no enjoyable thrill about it. This was something vastly different to gazing upon the filmed actions of others. A queer sensation tingled in the roof of Julie's mouth. About it was the suggestion of an odd taste of tarnished steel, and although she tried to convince herself that she was not frightened, her palate and lips gave physical evidence to the contrary. Julie remembered that some of the girls in the pictured stories had been rescued right away. Julie paused, listening. She waited, but heard no sound of a rescuer's approach. She remembered another filmed and thrilling story. The girl had died. She had been strangled to death by a masked man with clutching, talonlike hands. To several of her office companions Julie had recommended this particular picture.

"It's a dandy fillum," she had rhapsodized. "The last part's fine. It made me go goosey all over. You see if your eyes don't pop out when the feller gets the girl by the neck. I'm crazy about pictures with murders in 'em, ain't you?"

So say a good many of us, but our point of view concerning situations dramatic and creepy with mysterious evil, is likely to change when we figure as one of the principals in a real tight corner.

A crawly, horrid sensation came over Julie. She turned and looked behind her, but there was no masked and crouched figure creeping upon her. She was alone. It

then occurred to her that she might try to batter the door down with a chair; but although she went so far as to lift an ornate, upholstered affair with a thick back and heavy, clumsy legs, she only succeeded in raising her unwieldy battering-ram about a foot from the ground. Her hands were weak. Trembling. Her movements awkward. The chair leg scraped her shinbone before she carefully put it down and sat on it.

What next? Nothing was to be gained by sitting there staring at that door. Yet, the feeling had come over her that she must not make a noise. She wanted to scream and dared not. An overwhelming desire to run, to hide, to cower in some corner, gripped her; but the bright glare from the cluster of lamps pendant from the ceiling revealed to her in one hasty, furtive glance of investigation, that the only places of concealment were under the table or beneath the couch. Chilled and shrinking with a dread of she knew not what, Julie hunched her shoulders, clenched her hands together on her lap, and tucked her feet under the chair. The close-pressed contact of her legs caused a sharp, smarting twinge, and she remembered she had knocked herself. The sequel would have provoked a smile from any watcher possessed of a sense of humor; but to the girl there was nothing at all funny about the discovery she made when she thrust out her damaged leg.

"My new stockings!" she gasped. "Done for! That tear'll run right down to my foot. Ain't I the lucky girl now. Two bucks gone smack, and all through some horrid beast locking me in this filthy room."

For a moment this mood induced by deep concern for her silk hose, seemed likely to lift the girl out of her spell of submission to her predicament; but it was not long ere the importance of her stockings failed before the greater horror of her imprisonment. Fear was stronger than indignation, and a quivering whimper of growing abandonment to despairing thoughts marked the beginning of a period of hysterical suffering. For close on an hour she had been in that room, and ex-

cept for the indefinable unease and loathing caused by that paper-bound book of vile import, she had not been seriously alarmed.

Poise of mind, calm control of thought when confronted by the revelation of some unsuspected and unexpected peril, implies a trained, directing power of will, or a complete lack of imagination. True bravery exists in the first, but not in the last. Mental superiority; aloofness from the trap of adverse circumstances, gives hope, confidence and thereby brings nearer the achievement of conquering ability. Logically speaking Julie was in no greater danger than when she had first entered that room. Ignorance had been her bliss. Now, disturbing thoughts of her true position appalled her. Unaware that she was locked in, she had been comparatively content and unquestioning of the future. Now, the thought uppermost in her confused, distraught mind had no kinship with gratitude that she had found out she was a prisoner. The truth that should have prompted concentration of combating conditions and nerved her to the availment of the moments that were hers to plan and do with the determination to finish whatever she started, were being wasted. With childish, pitiable simplicity, Julie pressed her hands to her chin and wished herself back into a state of ignorance.

"If I'd never had touched that door, I wouldn't have known I was locked in," she thought. And presently the tears and she shook with stifled heart-rending sobs.

Seated in that brilliantly lighted, huge apartment of dead orgies and past scenes of high-stake gambling, she epitomized stark, scared, helpless grief. It cannot be said she was a craven; an out-and-out creature of cowardice, for she did not know how to call up the qualities, that cohesively amalgamated, endow us with courage. She was a mouse beneath a cat's paw. The human, spiritual part of her waited in vain the summons to gird the flesh. Her soul called to her, but it was yet unborn in her conception of herself. The divine link of her with the spirit that broods with benign, superfathering wisdom over the mole in its burrow, and man in his highest state of de-

velopment was to Julie an entirely dormant force. It was hers to command, but she captained an invisible host. She was unconscious of her heritage, and for all practical purposes, was, by the same token, a spiritual pauper.

"Oh, God!" she moaned, and the words were empty of all but a bubbling over of fear. She had used that same short combination upon a thousand trivial occasions when she had been moved to give vent to a phrase that has been stereotyped to promiscuous and common use to symbolism of surprise, pleasure, anger and pain or mere vapid, yawning indifference.

"My Gawd!" splutters the scrub-woman when she runs a splinter into her finger. "My God! It's disgraceful!" exclaims Mrs. Housewife when she is told the big-bug profiteers have sold her rightful share of sugar to Europe and the candy-makers. "My God! Ain't it hot—cold—wet—warm," and soon goes the chorus up and down the scale of word-poor squanderers of an overworked and very badly abused expression.

Of course, no harm is meant, there is seldom any vicious intent in the habit of debasing a big word to petty, piffling ejaculatory usage; but in the moments of crushing despair, when life itself is pulsing swiftly away, what then? "My God! Help me!" is probably the cry. "My God! Guard the loved ones whom I leave behind," is surely the prayer.

These messages are heard and conformably with the unindividualistic, all-weighting wisdom of the Master, are heeded, and strength is given to the bearers of heavy burdens; but the same lips that form the pleas for help perhaps did also with reckless license play fast and loose with the name that stands for far more than we can grasp. Our music is but the tinkle of a little bell; our science but a wavering pointer toward the immeasurable profundity of what we do not know. Funny little puppets we are; pigmy, bleating marionettes clinging and asprawl on a grain of dust in the universe. We exist by favor, and yet regardless of the spirit within us we turn our backs on the poetic truth in the sunset, and go into ecstasies over a *tour de force* with colored

pigments. We pray when hard pushed, and when by sheer clumsiness we hit a thumb-nail instead of a tack we say: "My God!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### BEHIND THE SIGN.

**J**ULIE was sincere enough in her call for help and protection. The trouble was she was on the wrong wire, and though her tongue shaped the formula for rescue, her soul was dumb; swamped in the pretty shell of the physical Julie.

To a matron with the predilection a hen has for gathering chicks under her protective wings; to a bold and muscular rescuer of fair maids in distress, Julie would have seemed a subject to be gathered in instanter, coddled and comforted to renewed and false belief that she could play with fire and be immune from getting burned. She would have gone forth from that room a weeping heroine of a nasty adventure. She would have been glorified as an innocent, much-deceived little saint.

Whereas, the truth of the matter was she had deliberately sought to dabble in dis-respectable excitement, and frequent the company of moral pirates. Had the process of her degenerate adventure been suave as a creeping, summer tide; had her initiation been long drawn out and bedizened with suitable accessories in the form of jewels, fine food, strong drink and rich raiment, she would have been self-drugged to animal blindness of the unclean. If her awakening had been put off until the day of premature decay; until the hour of death itself, it is none the less certain she would have paid in one intolerable moment for her debasement. Sooner or later, the women who smile for chance gold never fail to glimpse themselves in vivid loathsomeness. As for the jolly good fellow who pays the piper and provides the money for the harpies who enlist recruits under the scarlet banner of *les femmes perdues*, he should be "mugged" and tabulated in the rogues' gallery at police headquarters.

A whole lot of specious nonsense about wild oats for the go-to-the-devil calf, the watch-your-step, middle-aged roué and

the senile old debauchee would then just naturally evaporate. Under conditions of watchfulness given to other rascals, such as dips, thugs and comparatively square dealing gunmen, the thief of virtue and the exploiter of women would expire. A host of disgraceful domestic trials would never happen; and a multitude of food-for-carrion-crow grafters would be exterminated as agents of a cloaked game of moral butchery. We shoot mad dogs.

If Julie had been grabbed by releasing circumstances at the moment when she was crying for help, she probably would have been pawed about, exploited, boosted and—dropped. If she had been taken in later as an accomplished unfortunate, she would have been more or less patronizingly lectured, and perhaps given a fresh start and—perhaps not. If she persisted in refusing to cling to the unstable buoy of social toleration, and had not sufficient money or craftiness to mask her profession, she would have been dumped into a reformatory and very possibly completely squelched as a hopeful human being.

Messrs. Artie, Sid & Co., thanks be to their social perquisites and liberties as male animals, would get along quite nicely with their freedom.

Charming in her youthfulness, tempting in her lure to beasts, ignorant of the happiness and security in the observance of a few self-guarding, simple rules of good conduct, and besides all else, blind to her potentiality in the rôle of a loved wife and mother. So—was Julie—so have been others; *locked in*. Some few, who cannot be classified except as females of apish intelligence and low instincts, have deliberately locked the door on themselves and thrown the key away. We pity the poor idiot and the imbecile; but we do not allow them freedom to injure themselves and others. One rotten apple will contaminate a barrelful of choice fruit.

Julie's spasm of weeping passed. The last sob was checked in her throat. A sudden idea had popped into her head.

The door was locked, but what about the windows? Could she not open one, lean out and cry for help? Somehow or other she could attract attention and sum-



mons rescuers. If she couldn't make herself seen or heard she could throw something out. Scribble a note, maybe.

While she thus belatedly reasoned, the girl ran to the nearest heavy curtains and pulled them aside. The window was there all right, but what was wrong? Why was there that strange, unbroken darkness beyond? Why was there no lighted windows around? No lights of the city?

Close to the dirt-encrusted pane, Julie pressed her face; but she could see nothing but a thwarting obscurity. Standing on tiptoe she reached for the window-fastener. It had rusted into place, and before she managed to turn it, her fingers were sore and bruised. This was not all. The window was stuck fast in the frame. Tug and strain as she did on the curved holders screwed to the frame, she could not raise the window even a trifle. Had it been glued or nailed it could not have been more beyond her strength. She could not move it and that was an end of the matter. Was it?

Under action, we change. The helpless sit-and-sorrow submission holds us supine. Movement, even misdirected, hold possibilities of benefit. Julie's blood had warmed. She had undone the fastener, was she to be stopped by a pane of glass? Why shouldn't she break it? There would be a noise and damage, well—

"They had no right to lock me in!"

Who "they" were or what might be the outcome of her contemplated deed, Julie did not now stop to bother about. It had taken some time for her to rouse herself, but now she had started she felt like going on. Indeed, there was a certain amount of pleasure to be got from smashing that window. The door she could not break. This—

"Any one can break a pane of glass."

Julie wrapped her handkerchief round her knuckles and gave the window a sharp blow. It was a sidelong, glancing effort. A girl's ineffective punch and—she shut her eyes. Very naturally there was no crash, not even a crack in the glass. Which was just as well. A falling wedge of plate-glass can do a considerable amount of damage. A razor-blade is less dangerous.

Some idea of the risk she was running of injuring herself must have occurred to the girl. She dropped the clenched hand raised for another try and looked around. Wasn't there something hard she could break the window with?

Over in a corner behind an old baize-covered card-table she saw a long stick. It proved to be a billiard-cue. The balanced, loaded end couldn't have been bettered as a battering-ram for window-smashing. Besides she could stand back out of all harm.

One tap, and the deed was done. And after all, the noise was not so very great. The glass broke in big pieces and most of them fell clear of the narrow window-sill and stood edgewise on the thick carpet, propped against the wall. Removing a big, jagged triangle that still held in the window-frame, Julie looked out. She could hear the roar and hum of the traffic below; she could feel the fresh air blowing past her face, but she could see nothing. Nothing that is of human life and activity. All the rest was a maze of wires, heavy, wooden framework and boards. Excepting for a long, narrow opening far far above the top of the window, she was literally boxed in. The three windows of the big room were blinded by a huge electric sign. Here and there through tiny cracks in the boards, glinted sparks and spears of light. The brightly illuminated sign had a humorous appeal, and now and again a passer-by in the throng below would look up and grin.

Behind the sign, leaning through the broken window, her spread fingers half buried in the fine dust collected on the sill, stood Julie. Fear and despair were again creeping over her. Presently she screamed. Shrill, piercing it was, yet to those below, as far beyond their power of hearing as a baby's sigh.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### LANDED AND—STRANDED.

IN the half-open doorway of a hut made of ingeniously interlaced branches bedded in sun-baked mud, crouched a child of logical and disordered circumstance. Elbows on knees, chin cupped in the hollows

of her hands, Julie Falwell ruminated on the outcome of her lapse from the set program of an office toiler's existence. Her throne of contemplation was an empty packing-case and—as will have been noted, she was in name no longer Julie—*Somers*.

Above her aching, puzzled head was stretched a sheet of unbleached calico masquerading as a ceiling and masking the palm-thatched roof. Under her feet was sand. The floor of the hut was a natural, undisturbed continuation of the dazzling shore dividing the mysterious, brilliant green jungle from the equally cryptic, flamboyant sea. About seventy feet of hot, fine, sandy grit separated the hut from the sea, and between the door and the Atlantic was the well that supplied Julie and her neighbors with fresh water.

Had there been no inhabitants, a shipwrecked castaway could have wandered over those burning sands and perished of thirst, and yet, in the course of a dozen miles or so, could have unknowingly, actually stood over a limitless supply of pure water.

The "well" consisted of a shallow hole wherein was sunk a barrel. The level of the water was less than fourteen inches below the surface. The hut was more than three thousand miles distant from the Mogolia Hotel.

Color, in the zone of South America's sub-tropical rain belt, is plenteous, raw, and vivid. It is a land of contrasts, of sudden night and flashing dawn. It is the extreme, sharp-edged, and between sun-up and sun-down has no place for half-lights and soft, melting shadows. It is the home of swift, primal hatred, sudden passions; and death and life are lightly staked in the gamble of existence.

Under the canopied ceiling cloth were two whitewashed dividing walls about seven feet high. The hut was really nothing more than a fifteen by fifteen roughly woven, inverted basket, partially partitioned off into three compartments. From the top of the dividing walls to the ceiling was an unobstructed space of four feet. The windows were just rectangular holes left in the outer walls and, although provided with shutters, there was no glass to them. The outer doors opened in two halves, like the doors

of a stable, and inside one could walk from front to back without fear of forgetting to close the doors. There were not any.

The furniture consisted of a box and a hammock. A shutter laid across a couple of shaky trestles formed a table.

Artie had mentioned that he would have electric lights, hot and cold water laid on and rosewood and mahogany furniture installed. But—he had never returned to attend to these details. He had known he would not be witness of the girl's plight when she found she was deserted, but it had gratified his loathsome sense of humor to mock at her without her being aware she was being fooled. Artie was no slant-eyed, oblique-minded son of Nippon; but he was first cousin to these subtle little brown men in his liking for planting secret traps and sowing unpleasant surprises. An Oriental finds a strange angle of delight in insulting another without that person's knowledge. Three parts of the pleasure vanishes if the insult should be discovered. Deep sea monstrosities are not half as bizarre in their ugliness as some men are in their kinkiness of mind.

If the truth be strictly adhered to, all that Artie had left Julie in the way of house furnishings was the empty box and the makeshift table. The hammock had been lent to her by the proprietress of a near-by bodega, and from the same source Julie had bought a small lamp, a tin plate, a coffee-pot, and an enameled mug. To the squat, sultry-eyed, but amiable store-keeper, the girl was also indebted for sympathy and kindness given in sign language and practical ways.

The woman had shown her how to sling her hammock from the hooks clamped to the roof-supports of the hut, how to lay in it with the maximum of comfort, and how to make a remarkably good cup of coffee from a powder the color and consistency of finely ground snuff.

The native Brazilian method of coffee-brewing is primitive, effective, and to the uninitiated, a finger-scalding, temper-testing job.

Over the top of the coffee-pot is laid a square piece of clean rag. This is poked into the pot to form a hollow. The edges

of the cloth are left hanging outside. Into the bowl of the cloth is placed a good sized handful of pounded coffee. Boiling water is then poured over the powder until the coffee-pot is nearly full. After a minute or two of simmering, the four corners of the cloth are gathered in the left and right hands and the real coffee-making commences. The trick consists in twisting the two ends of the rag in opposite directions until the coffee is confined in the center and can be squeezed and wrung until all the deep-brown fluid is pressed out. But not a grain of coffee must be allowed to escape. The result is, a pot full of coffee that is as black as one can wish for, but clear as if it had been filtered. It is—coffee. Not a cafeteria demi tasse of boiled, over or under roasted beans, but sun-kissed coffee that the percolator seldom percolates.

After Julie had been initiated into control of the coffee-rag, she thought that one so wise might also have some magic way of disposing of the small, but populous inhabitants of her hut. In turn she pointed to the ants scurrying busily about the sandy floor, the lizards alert-headed on the tops of the walks; the red beetles that came and warmed their toes at the driftwood fire. All she got was a shrug of wonder that she should bother about such not-to-be-considered trifles, and in the wisdom that comes with time, Julie learned that with things that cannot be avoided or chased, one gives up shuddering and no more than occasionally indulges in a shrug.

Later she found there is a song, a chanted prayer as it were, that the women of the huts sing to the red beetle. The burden of the song is a polite plea that the harata will kindly refrain from eating one's clothes. She also discovered that the only really efficient way of disposing of a tarantula is to swipe him with the weapon the housewife uses to chase a cat. A broom is the primitive swatter *par excellence*. A frying-pan or a shoe are dodgeable and quite useless as a means of putting a period to the sidelong and backward jumps of these funny spiders. They can move faster than many men can dodge taxes.

The bodega woman was Julie's informant in a matter touching her personal interests.

Strangers give us details of our most intimate affairs, a debonair, whistling, freckle-faced messenger on two crank-driven wheels brings as a slip of paper bearing terse notification of birth, death or a wedding; fortune or misfortune. We tip him and turn aside to hide our laughter or our tears.

From this woman Julie had learned something else. The manner of the telling had been mostly in dumb show; but none the less clear and unmistakable. The woman had taken her left hand, pointed to the ring on Julie's third finger, and led her to the door. She had then pointed to a ship far out at sea, waved her hand with a fluttering motion indicative of flight, and nodding at Julie, had directed her forefinger to the floor. Then she had dolefully shaken her head and emitted a meaning sound suggestive of grief.

"Your husband has gone away. You stay here."

As plainly as if spoken in English, Julie had gathered the woman's meaning, but with that curious pride that prevents a wife's open acknowledgement that desertion is her portion, Julie had acted a smiling part.

Artie was an unwanted and an embarrassing husband, but the query big in the bodega woman's face was turned aside. Julie had been scared and conscious of an inner, sinking feeling at being left to face the future alone; but she had nodded and shown her small white teeth in brave make-believe that she had known all the time that Artie had gone away. She had even controlled herself so far as to laboriously make sign that he was coming back.

The fiction did not deceive the bodegakeeper, but being a lady in her common kinship of womanliness to the girl, she pretended to accept Julie's demonstration of the case.

There are gentlewomen who have never worn a pair of shoes with Louis Quinze heels, who have never seen a real bathtub, who cannot write their own name; yet who possess fundamentals of a fine and considerate courtesy. The rude, the unfeeling and the boorish are oftener found in the cities than in sparsely populated back-of-beyond wilds. Constant contact with

nature induces a kindly simplicity. The friction of artificial township often produces a mischievous and heartless cruelty.

Julie was now six weeks out from a Brooklyn dock, and Artie, representing the moving, culminating factor of invited but unsuspectedly knavish circumstance, had jerked her out of her job, her rooming-house, and stranded her high and dry on the shell-strewn coast of Brazil.

It had been an unpremeditated flight, and a hard, disconcerting fall. As a reflex from the bump that signified she had stopped moving, Julie's nerves were still jerking to a rag, and *now* was the time to sit down and review the past, take stock, and think.

Think! There was the trouble. Julie found it easy enough to sit corporally lax and still; but she most decidedly did not know how to control her thoughts to a lucid, ordered pace or sequence. Her brain, trained to the seizure of a predetermined occurrence; set and nicely keyed to the furtherance of scheduled commonplace happenings, was still awl with a dizzy, nightmarish phantasmagoria of new and upsetting experience. Five or six weeks of travel, preceded by events that were still greatly shrouded in mystery to her, were crammed pell-mell into the closet of jumbled memories. The moment Julie tried to hitch herself to the beginning of the wild carouse of doings that had followed her first meeting with Artie Falwell, the gnome manipulating the record of her scrappy, pictured thoughts, went crazy.

At times the ribbon of mental photographs that started with the first glimpse of the man who had swept her off her unstable equilibrium, sped too fast for her to seize on any one blurred memory. Then, with erratic inconsequence, the film would slow up, and with dirgelike persistence, Julie's thoughts would cluster round some disconcerting, sordid scene. She had courted adventure, and lacking the discriminating salt of experience, found herself wofully disillusioned with a crop of misadventures. Her emotions were sunburnt and writhing helplessly under a searing rash of prickly self-pity. For Julie there was no philosophic unguent compound of calm, stand-

aside, impersonal view of herself. She had no power to glimpse the humor that always clings to the heels of trouble and tragedy and urges courage by impish mockery of futile tears.

Some unhappy ones there are, who, however straight their circumstance and deep their trouble, cannot hurl W. E. Henley's defiant barrage at onward, rushing fate. They cower and wilt at the rumble of the storm. They flee when the winds of adversity flippantly shred their self-complaisance.

As we know, Julie had her fair share of vanity, her modicum of positive knowledge regarding the promiscuous attractions of her femininity. She knew the charm of a glance from her downcast, heavy-lashed, blue eyes. She could gage with a fair degree of accuracy, the effect, on some men, of the pathetic droop to her full, red lips. She knew the pulling quality of a semi-veiled curve, the appeal of a daintily shod, arched instep; but being still unaware that she had a soul to be preserved in supreme control of the physical Julie, she very naturally couldn't acclaim her captaincy over her own destiny.

To think was an effort, and she was quite ready to drift and allow events to direct her course. There was a paucity of quality in the emotions experienced by Julie. The stirring of old memories irked her, the finer chords of feeling remained undisturbed. She had existed in a world of give and take where shades of meaning and sensitive distinctions went unasked, unheeded, and unrecognized. No one had made for her any sacrifice that she was aware of and for no one had she had the joy of small martyrdom. No favors had been asked and none given. Wrong had been intended toward her, but no great harm had resulted. Her life had been lacking in any perceptible dimension of friendship of comradely interest or love. By force of circumstances had the evil sufficiency of each day's impotency in her development held sway until the moment when she had sought opportunity under the wrong banner.

For Julie there had been no mother to scold and gently love. No evenings round the family table with father filling the room

with smoke and her ears with detailed bits of philosophic comment on the day's doings. The only living thing she had ever possessed had been the kitten she had rescued and—lost. For her there had been no direct call to God or the devil, and beyond a certain glib sharpness in seizing some conditions as they presented themselves, Julie, although blossoming into physical womanhood, was mentally a child. She had been one of the city's crowding self-centered millions, and she had been totally unaware of her isolated loneliness and ignorance. Now she was still alone, but the need of initiative was more apparent. She sought some guiding light, some objective and wondered uncertainly which path to choose. Should she go back and take up her old life or should she go on and try to take advantage of unusual circumstances? Should she drift with the tide or should she row?

All of us, at some time or another, tread a dark road, often alone. There may be shadows; silent fantoms moving beside us, but they know us not, nor we they. They, too, are stumbling onward in loneliness of inarticulate spirit. Presently the road curves and around the bend we see a distant light; sometimes of love, sometimes of hope. We press onward, grow sure of foot, we draw near. We revel in effulgence and still progressing—halt. Beyond the light above, the road vanishes into darkness. Is it the end? Are there other lamps. Who knows? Only the brave, seeking truth. Onward they go from light to dark. And soon there is no more night. The wayfarer steps into the enduring, all-pervading light of—faith.

Julie had traveled many miles, yet she had not yet set out with deliberate purpose on life's journey. She was, so to speak, all dressed up, ready, but she had nowhere to go. She had had a lesson, but it had only served to sharpen her wits. She was still willing to follow the will-o'-the-wisp of unthought-out, unweighed desires.

Artie Falwell, sneak-prowler of many cities, had stalked Julie for—what? Was it her attractiveness, her distinguishing, personal and unique allure over ten times ten thousand of her sisters? Was it some men-

tal or spiritual difference, some quality rare in other girls that had attracted Artie to the scent of plunder. No, it was just Julie's youth, her clearness of skin, her lack of experience, and—her saleability. This had tempted Artie to development of opportunity.

On the checkered board of his game of low cunning in the chain of events, Falwell had played the part of knight sinister. His oblique moves had been oddly fraught with the power of surprising disturbance, and it was during one of his sudden, unpremeditated jumps that he landed plump into Julie's daily round of small toils and pleasures. For a few hours after the meeting at Fourteenth Street L, the girl had been a willing pawn. But in the game of life as well as the squared arena where kings and queens, rooks, bishops, and knights meet in mimic conflict, the often unconsidered pawn is the *deus ex machina* of fateful destiny.

The circumstance that Julie's patient Ernest had stood staring on the day she had met Artie, and afterward followed her to the Mog had but added a tintillating filip to that part of the evening. After Leila had made her fruitless attempt to warn the girl, Julie never saw or spoke to the flouted young man who had watched and waited while a stranger had walked off with his girl, and when Julie became Mrs. Falwell she had not the vaguest suspicion that Artie's procurement of her marriage-license was but the growth of danger threatened by the combined efforts of Leila and Ernest.

After he had done what was urged upon him by Leila that honest young man had decided consistently with his ways of looking at things, that a girl so prompt and easily moved to risqué dalliance as Julie, should never have been considered as a prospective wife for himself, and he was well rid of her. So he washed his hands of Julie and her affairs, and set about reconstructing his conception of female constancy and loyalty. He had gone out of his way to save the girl, but the sting of having been so promptly discarded still remained. Unsubstantiated, vague dreams of the cozy little apartment, in the Bronx or on the



outer borders of Brooklyn, presided over by domestic felicity, had gone aglimmering. Before he went to bed, Ernest made a general and final clean-up. This complete destruction and uprooting of all things and thoughts connected with the faithless Julie was unpleasant even to a lukewarm lover, but common sense prevailed over sentiment, and in the morning, after he had gone to his office, the young man's landlady found her share in Ernest's minor tragedy awaiting her under the washstand. Other girls had preceded Julie in Ernest's experimental, but carefully and tentatively conducted courtships, and he made a good job in eliminating all souvenirs of his modest and unlurid past. One clean-up often necessitates another.

Tied with odd lengths of string were three bulging newspapers. The first contained a scrumple of ripped catalogs relative to apartment furnishings at nothing down, and a dollar a week, for years and years and—years. The second parcel was of a mixed character, and one peep through the torn corner was sufficient to satisfy the old lady that there was nothing there worth saving. Landladies have no mania for collecting the halves of show-tickets, withered flowers, and bits of this and that symbolic of their roomers vanished and past episodes. As for the third packet, the string slipped, a puff of wind came through the open window, and a swirl of charred paper flew annoyingly over the carpet, up in the air and under the furniture.

One clean-up often—

Sneezing, grumbling and grunting to herself, the landlady went down on her knees; made busy with broom and dust-pan, and the ashes of Ernest's love-letters mingled with the flying dust.

That, so far as Julie is concerned, ends the passing influence upon her career exercised by Ernest Kennedy. His meeting with Leila was the one event in his life that winged his feet of clay, and we drop him where he stands; slow, staring and meticulously counting the cost before he again ventures to "walking out."

As for Julie's bemusement of thought, there was cause enough. When, screaming with abandon to terror, she had turned

from the sign-enclosed window, Artie had come to her, not as a persecutor, but open-armed, voluble in contrite, and apologetic expressions. To Julie in the revulsion of feeling consequent upon her sudden release from the bonds of fear, Artie appeared as a prince of deliverance. His aureole of greatness lost nothing in her estimation when he vowed he was crazy about her and nothing could make him happier than they should be married right away.

The motive that had actuated Artie was fear for his own skin, but this Julie did not yet know. She now suspected much, but the truth was not plain to her.

Artie, as can well be imagined, had a past that dangled with hooks and loose threads of old rascalities. Sooner or later forgotten misdeeds have a way of joining up, and with the partnership of Leila and Ernest plus the "good woman," Artie faced a chance of short shrift and a long term of imprisonment. Also there was Sid. And also—there was the Mog management. A precious coterie. The only safe way out for that Augean tribe was for Artie to marry the girl and decamp. Many minds, low and crapulent united in the conspiracy for his disappearance.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THROUGH THE PORTHOLES.

"LET'S elope," had cried Artie with slick dissimulation of his unrestful, unloverlike condition of mind, and Julie, not knowing what had been going on while she had been locked in that disused gambling-chamber, had gulped down her sobs and endowed Artie with a flavor of pinchbeck romance.

All in the same breath, Artie made much of his opportunity. He painted their future with dashing, colorful boldness.

"Money to burn!" he stated, and, not unnaturally, Julie had opened a prospect that so well suited her undiscerning state of mind. It required precious little persuasive ability to lead her to create a picture of elegant ease and foresee a honeymoon of triple distilled sweetness and elegance aboard a palatial liner.

By the show of a plentiful supply of bank-notes Artie demonstrated his power to make the dream a solid reality; but Julie was ignorant of the trick he had practised upon her by a simple feat of legerdemain, and thus magnified a few hundred dollars into the appearance of thousands. It had seemed to Julie that her eager suitor had money in every pocket, but Artie's thrice displayed handful of twenties and fifties had been shuffled and transferred from pocket to pocket and reexhibited by fingers well trained and long accustomed to deceitful manipulation.

"Money to burn!"

These words pleased Julie. They had a pleasant, luxurious ring to them; a potent suggestion of delightful irresponsibility; and when Artie backed his evidence of material prosperity by the open avowal that he was in a condition of mind approaching idiocy, Julie accepted the declaration and leaned trustfully against his narrow chest.

"I'm crazy about you," had said Artie.

There are various and curious ways of giving expression to sentiments of love; but many young men speak more truly than they are aware of when they more or less sincerely echo the words of Artie Falwell. They mistake infatuation for love and are in reality temporarily abnormal, and this self-confessed condition of mind is accepted as a compliment by the adored one, and adventure *a deux* is born to fruit or—to wither.

Without any appreciable degree of thought, Julie had accepted Artie's proposal of marriage. He had money to burn and—he was crazy about her. Two often all-sufficing reasons for committing matrimony in headlong haste.

Freed of the appendages strung to it, by human frailty and wickedness, love can raise man to thoughts and deeds of super-nobility. Inversely, false love is often the excuse for acts of unthinkable buffoonery and violent loosening of the lower passions. Some approach the altar clad in white raiment, but others caper and prowl in the wake of love as grinning jesters and sneaking jackals, and the primal love of the jungle finds a baser replica in the ultramodern ballroom.

Artie's headquarters were the Mog, and between the time they left this rendezvous of specious outlaws, and Julie found herself in a second-class cabin aboard the boat, she had among a confused blur of rushings hither and thither, no very clear memories. From the Mog they had gone a long distance in a big touring-car. The wedding had taken place in some small town that Julie did not know the name of. Immediately the brief ceremony was over, they had gone off in the car again.

From the moment the ring was on her finger, Artie's eagerness to please had changed to a brooding, nervous moroseness. He spoke little and on the way back to the city, Julie had dozed off with sheer fatigue and reaction from excitement. They had breakfasted at a restaurant on the outskirts of the city and, following that, Artie had given Julie money to buy a trunk and clothes for the journey.

Practised in making a little go a long way, the girl had managed to equip herself fairly well, and although Artie had shown her no surplus of gentleness or overcordial consideration since the wedding, she tried to save as much as she could out of the amount he had given her. She did not love him. She had consented to marry him in a moment when she was incapable of self-questioning or good judgment. Like many another young girl, Julie had not really known what marriage implied. Still, although she believed that Artie had plenty of money, she looked forward to showing herself a saving little wife.

Artie had received the change with a sneer.

"S that all?" he had asked. "Well, you ain't done so bad as a spender. Here's—a couple of dollars for yourself."

At the time of receiving the two-dollar bill, Julie had wondered a little at the curious grin with which Artie had accompanied his peculiar donation, but she had put the money in her bag. On their arrival on board the boat, Artie had gone in search of the steward and what he called a snifter.

Wondering how they could manage to move around in so small a place as the cabin, Julie had stood mechanically polishing her nails on her palm.

"Married!"

This had been the pivot of Julie's thoughts when she stood in the cabin. It was an event. A crossroad; the old life of drudgery was done with. She was bound for a new life. An existence free from penny-pinching.

"A wife!"

How strange it had all seemed. So it had been; but that which followed outdid all that Julie had passed through. She recollected well enough now. It all came back to her clearly: Artie's voice outside the port-hole. Then another's, a husky, wheezy rumble.

They were talking about her. Their voices were low, but at intervals, reached her clearly.

Kneeling on the bunk, Julie looked out. She saw Artie and a big, overdressed, fat man, standing by the rail under the promenade deck. It was nearing sailing time, and the lower deck was deserted. Their backs were turned; but the girl had recognized the big man. It was he who had stepped between her and that woman who had jumped out of the cab.

The undetectable confab of Artie and Sid bears repeating:

"You left her in the cabin?" asked Sid.

"Sure. She's waiting for me. Guess I'll have a good time. I ain't so sorry now the burst-up came along. The thing I wanna know though is, what 'll I do with her. I don't mind being hitched for a couple of weeks, but hanged if I want t' be tied up for keeps."

Sid's short laugh was hoarse and—meaning.

"I reckon you'll know how to get rid of her when the time comes. She ain't the first. Here. Shove this money in your pocket. There's five hundred there, an' don't forget that settles all accounts. You can consider yourself on velvet. All exes paid and a good slice over. I suppose the new Mrs. F. has a wad tucked away. These innocent, hard-working stenogs generally save up."

"Aw! I ain't married no Wall Street filly. Julie ain't got more'n a couple of dollars, an' that I give her." Artie cackled softly. "One of these days," he went on,

"when the rumpus has all blown over an' I'm back, I'll tell you the yarn about that two bucks. It's a rich joke."

Sid looked down at Artie, slightly interested; but the deck-hands were getting ready to cast off, and the tale Artie had to tell was indefinitely postponed. There was one, though, whose interest had not been just slightly stirred.

Just then the siren boomed. The moment for departure was at hand.

"I've done my bit," went on Sid. "Seen you aboard and paid you the money put up by the Mogolia bunch for the getaway of the pair of you. That girl would have been too easy a witness to leave around. Locking her in that room was a fool trick. You've got off easier than you deserve. You've got your bit, though, so don't get writing home for more. That's the last you'll get."

Sid lumbered away a step.

"You won't forget Leila?"

"You bet we won't, and we'd hand a little keepsake to that Gordon woman, too, if we got the chance. She'd have had us all pinched if we hadn't been tipped off. She's too high up to monkey with, though. S'long."

Artie had hinted at some story attached to the two-dollar bill he had given her. With anxious desire to solve whatever mystery was attached to this, Julie had slipped down off the bunk and opened her bag. In the confusion of her mind, caused by what she had partly overheard, her thoughts now took a curious twist, and yet they were not inconsistent. Julie was superstitious.

Mrs. Bruce had given her a two-dollar bill. Artie had handed her another. They were both in her bag, and she had not torn the corners of them. That meant bad luck!

A tiny scrap torn from the corner of a two-dollar bill is supposed to be a charm against the alleged ill fortune attendant upon their possession. Foolish; but older, and one would suppose, wiser people than Julie believe in all sorts of nonsense connected with walking under ladders, spilling salt, and piebald horses.

Julie had turned out the contents of her bag. On the top lay the folded bill given her by Artie. She had spread it out. The

First glance had shown her that the bill had already been mutilated. A semicircular little piece had been nipped off the corner.

By herself?

To Julie this had seemed an absurd idea. An uncanny piece of silly imaginativeness. Yet she had her own way of treating two-dollar bills against their suppositious bad luck, and this one certainly bore the cutting mark of her own sharp-pointed thumbnail.

She had looked in her empty bag, turned it inside out, and from a seam in the lining she had gathered five scraps of discolored bank-note paper. These were corner pieces rent from two-dollar bills she had received during the last month or two. One by one she fitted them to the bill given her by Artie. The third one joined perfectly.

Julie had not known that the two portions of a piece of torn paper cannot be duplicated in facsimile; but she had nevertheless jumped to the correct conclusion that the bill given her by Artie had sometime previously been in her possession. It did not take her very long to decide then, and it came to her with oppressive certainty that she had not only married a waster, but a thief. A pickpocket!

"The piker! The mean, hateful piker!"

Further words had failed the girl, but the opprobrious name applied to Artie held all the contempt and anger she was capable of expressing.

Sometimes it is one thing, sometimes another, but the blows that strike at tender susceptibilities either strengthen or weaken character. An indignity crushes or builds. Julie stood at the parting of the ways: meek submission or—defiance. Fortunately she did not love, so the emotion that drags a girl down when overwhelmed by sorrowful disillusionment did not operate with Julie. Only her pride was stung, and she felt only rage at the deception played upon her. She was tired, wearied out; but the discovery she had made; the hints and odd remarks passed by Artie and Sid, galvanized her nervous energy to fierce resentment.

We all have our weak spots. Some of them of mean importance and unique to the individual. One man is tenderly care-

ful that none should cast a slur on his chickens or his dog. Another will grin with delight if some one slaps him on the back and calls him a happy spender; but he will smolder with wrath if he is complimented on his care in money matters. It may come near to breaking his heart if he has to spend a needless nickel, but he just dotes upon being told he is an extravagant dog. Tell a woman that she waddles, or is too fat or too thin, and if it happens to be her pet and cherished weakness to be thought just the opposite to what has been said, she will probably hold a life grudge against you.

These are the particular cracks in the armor of self esteem, and differ with each person; but the things discovered by Julie would have sent any girl sky-rocketing with indignation.

## CHAPTER XV.

PRESENT—ONE WHITE MAN.

WHEN Artie, primed to unpleasantly good humor, had returned to the cabin, he found a somewhat different Mrs. Falwell to the one he had eloped with.

"What y'u staring at?" he had demanded.

"A cheap skate. A piker—a—"

Julie had held up the two-dollar bill.

Artie gurgled pleasantly.

"How'd you get so wise all of a sudden?"

"You ask me that? When you had the nerve to stand talking right outside there!"

Artie had gaped foolishly at the open port-hole. He had then given a cackle of derisive indifference. The affair had struck him as being humorous.

"My—my mistake," he had hiccuped. "I know my way about town—but boats! Huh! I pass! Don't know the sharp end from the t'other. Give you my word, I thought we were on the other side of the ship. Don't matter now, though. You had t' get w-wise sometime or n'other. It's all right. Good 'nough. No need t' start shoutin'. You're my wife right 'nough. Th' young and beau-ti-ful Mrs.

F. Pleased t-to meetcha. Sure we're married."

"Yes, married to a sneaking pick-pocket."

The two-dollar bill thrust at him by the girl had thrown Artie off his balance. He had taken a mental degenerate's delight in handing her part of the money he had stolen from her at the Mog; but, how did she know for certain this was the actual bill? How could she be so positive that this was the bill that had been one of the small roll taken from her bag?

When Julie had shown her proof, Artie had glanced out of the porthole, and noticing that the dock side was slipping past, he knew that he could afford to save himself the trouble of further dissembling. Julie could say what she liked, but she couldn't get away from him. So, with a curse-seasoned grin he had admitted the truth and tried to smooth the affair over by expressing his craziness for the girl, and boldly asserting that he had stolen the money to get her into his power. He had. But not for the purpose of marriage. The curse had been a silent one, for in his heart or what passed for that organ of misuse in his narrow chest, Artie held a bitter grudge against Julie. He blamed her as his hoodoo, and looked upon her as responsible for all the trouble that had come upon him and driven him from his favorite haunts. Not yet did he want to part with her who was his wife, therefore—

"We're spliced!" he had elegantly reiterated. "Don't forget that. You're wearing my ring."

"Your ring? This badge of shame! Yes, I'll wear it and I'll continue to do so, as a protection from you and the talkers."

"Hot air! A lotta talk, that's all there is to that," had opined Artie.

But Julie had seen the matter differently, and with surprising firmness. Unlike the woman who wore a scarflet letter as a badge of shame, Julie kept her ring in token of her inviolateness. It was to be the sign of an impassable barred protecting her from Artie, and a deterrent to gossip from others.

"This ring," she had said, holding up her finger, "stands for just one thing—

one. I'm Mrs. Falwell; but I'm not your wife, and never will be, except in name. You come near me and I'll scratch your eyes out. I want another cabin. If I don't get it I'll tell—I'll tell the captain. I'll tell everybody about you and what you've done. You can say I'm sick, anything; but I won't stay here. I'd rather be shut in with a—with a mad dog. You're drunk now. Oh! I can't tell you what you are. What is the meaning of it all?"

"You've got me," had grunted Artie with a leer of solemn mockery. "But w-why worry? We'll have a good trip. A slap-up honeymoon, eh?"

"Stay right where you are!" had cried the girl when Artie attempted to come a step nearer.

From the moment when she had heard his talk with Sid and discovered that two-dollar bill, he had typified in her conception of him all that meant meanness and low trickery. Then had come a deeper, unexpressible sense of utter loathing. He claimed her as his wife. She was a girl. Alone! She shrank with a dread almost equal to her fear of Artie, from raising a cry for help and causing a scene. Strange men and women would flock to the cabin door. Reports would be printed. All her story would be made public. If she left the boat at the next port, return would be impossible, her history would follow her. It would not lose by being repeated. Her job at the office would be gone, and she would be cast adrift to swim or—sink.

The situation had to be met by sheer will-power. Everything had to be done quietly, and this man was to be held at bay; dominated by a personality greater than his own.

Did he fear exposure more than she herself did?

It was a remote possibility, and her only hope. Artie was impervious to words of contempt; careless and indifferent to the hate and repulsion she felt welling from her being as a burning flame. The only thing to do was to be cold. Icily aloof. To hold her temper. Check her passionate desire to scream, tear and rend.

It had been a big part to play, and the effort left the girl a wreck of nervous en-

ergy for days. For what had seemed an age of slow, long drawn out suspense she had stood facing the smirking Artie. She had seen a look of uncertainty come into his confident eyes. Peeping fear had alternated with the desirousness of his glance.

"You're my wife," he had repeated as if to bolster a claim he felt himself to be losing hold upon.

"No more than in name. I wouldn't allow you to clean my shoes. You will move away from that door and treat me with respect now and always. If not—"

"What?"

"I shall go to the captain and claim protection."

Julie had spoken beyond her knowledge, and was in reality unaware how great is the power of the captain of a ship, but Artie was not sure how he would come off in a showdown. Also, he was aware that the boat was equipped with wireless. He thought he was within the law, but—one could never tell. Sympathy would be with the girl, and the safest thing to do was to let her have her way—for the time being.

As a general rule, a show of pluck; an exhibition of grit will excite admiration even from the lowest; but Artie had no manliness in him. All hog, the only thought in his head as the girl passed him, was one of disappointment that he had not been able to lead her as he had wished. He was a thing completely selfish; a creature of thin blood and small desires.

"Aw! Who cares," he had muttered when the cabin door closed with Julie outside. "I'll fix her for standing me off. Time 'nough. I don't have t' hurry."

Artie had already shown some disconcerting traits of variable temper; but after Julie's ultimatum respecting their relationship, he had changed to a subtly disquieting politeness. There was a vicious coldness lurking in his glance, a grittiness underlying his smooth manner. Artie was deep, on the wrong side. On the other hand, it may be envisaged that Julie Falwell was not capable of any great depth of feeling. Her epidermis was delicate enough to look at, but tough or—insensitive. Kittenlike, she would purr or spit as she was

stroked or prodded. In the days that followed it had been a pleasure to watch the girl trying to puzzle out her future, and the reason why he had married her.

More than once Julie had caught him eying her with somewhat of the air of a covetous, illbred dog; and when on rarer occasions, he sat near her on deck, she suffered in silence the worldly wise look in his half-shut, insultingly appraising eyes.

"You thought," he would mutter when no one was near, "that I married you for love; that I was going to spend good money on you because I liked the cut of your pretty face. Huh! Found your mistake out now, ain't you?"

"Why did you do it?"

"Because if the cops or anybody had come butting in, you'd have squealed about being shut in that room."

"Did you do it?"

"What? Lock you in? Sure I did."

"Why?"

When Julie had asked this question, Artie had refused to enlighten her. Even he could not tell of the traffic he had attempted to make with Sid.

"One of these days when I'm good an' ready maybe I'll tell you. I guess you'll understand. You ain't so simple as you look, and I ain't as bad as you think I am."

After calling at Para, the boat had gone on down the coast of Brazil; but the Falwells had stayed, and in that mecca of bagmen from Europe, of Parisian luxury and tropic splendor, Artie again had tried to dispose of Julie and at the same time acquire a bit of Judas change. In this connection a side light may be thrown on Artie Falwell.

Having found the creature he wanted, the next thing was to steer his prospective client to a place where words could be accompanied by drink. Artie did most of the talking and all of the drinking.

Some hint of what had been at the back of Artie's mind has already been given; but lots of rash, unpleasant things are said and never performed. In this case Artie soon left no room for doubt concerning the possibilities that had been hinted at by Sid.



"You've seen her," he said. "How about it? Do we make a deal?"

"I came here with you for that," replied the prospect, and waited.

Artie balanced a cube of sugar on the edge of a spoon. His hand shook a trifle as he allowed the water to fall drop by drop on the sugar and drip into his glass. Absinthe making is an art; an unholy rite, and requires care and attention. Artie's signs of agitation were not caused by any nervousness over what he was doing, or compunction concerning his thoughts. He suffered from an overweening eagerness to get his price. When the sugar finally crumbled and the glass was one-third full of thin sirup, Artie tilted a bottle labeled *oxegene*, and the sweetened water took on a greenish yellow hue. Artie sipped, smacked his lips, and waited for the other to speak.

"Well," he snapped at last. "What's the offer?"

The other shrugged his shoulders.


"I am the buyer, not the seller."

"Aw, make an offer," urged Artie, but failed to make any impression on his client. So he talked; concocted more absinthe, and soon the screen that semiprivately shut off the corner where the pair sat, proved no barrier to Artie's incautious voice.

A young man who sat frowning over the entries he was making in his order book, presently looked up. He could see nothing of Artie or his companion; but he eyed the screen with sudden, awakened hostility. What was that he overheard? Was it possible that such things could be said; cold bloodedly proposed? He closed the order-book and sat a little closer to the screen. The words of Artie were now slurred and lower in tone; but they could be heard. Beyond the shadow of a doubt, full certainty was established in the listener's mind respecting what was being hatched.

**This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.**

# Skid Smith, Scheme Specialist



By Dale M. Brown

**W**HEN Skid Smith received his unconditional release from the manager of the Belgian Maids Company, he shrugged indifferently, grinned with supreme good nature, and plodded from Willowdale by way of the railroad track.

Skid persisted in being an actor in the face of managerial opposition, and many similar discouragements had not disabused his mind of a fixed belief that true talent must some day win recognition. So, at each fresh discouragement he would pocket what little he had coming to him and far-

sightedly set off in the general direction of Chicago or New York, whichever was nearer.

Skid's theatrical career covered a period of two years, or forty-one engagements, and his grin and fixed belief in his ability were still with him. This, too, in spite of the facts that his face made one think of the taste of a green persimmon, and his general appearance indicated that an apprentice carpenter had hastily constructed him of two-inch slats, plastered a shock of wheat atop his creation, and draped upon it a few convenient articles of clothing discarded by men of different sizes. Everything about Skid was peculiar, even to his good nature and his ability to win friends despite their convictions.

On this occasion Skid reached a trestle about a mile from Willowdale, on the way to his forty-second theatrical engagement, when he happened to remember that Lombard was twenty miles from Willowdale, and that Jim Baker, whom he had known as a boy, had been running a shoe-store in Lombard a year previous. Skid had met Jim in Sioux City, and Jim had invited him to drop in some day for a visit.

It is not surprising that Skid believed Jim meant it; and when the thought of Jim's invitation came to him, Skid sat down upon the trestle and considered it very seriously. Finally, he nodded his lean head and plodded back to the Willowdale Hotel, where the Belgian Maids' manager sat on the veranda.

"Harlow," said Skid earnestly, "you are a rotten actor, and a rottener manager, and the rottenest poker player I ever knew. If there is one thing in the world of which you are sublimely ignorant, it is the art of playing poker. I have walked two miles to tell you that if I could not play poker better than you can—"

At this point, Harlow, who is human, and not invulnerable to insult, interrupted scathingly, and a long, heated argument ensued. The result of this argument was that some time later Harlow and Skid faced each other across a table in an up-stairs room for three hours, at the end of which time Skid had subtracted from his recent manager everything except the suit on his

back, carfare for the company to the next stand, and one back drop.

That is how it happened that when Skid Smith dropped in on Jim Baker in his Lombard store, he was resplendent in Harlow's plaid suit and two dollars' worth of tonsorial attention. On his face was the characteristic grin, and in one hip-pocket was the evidence to convict him of having, for the first time in his life, a great deal of money.

"Hello, Jim!" said Skid. "I have come to spend a week or so with you. I know that you're glad to see me. How is the little lady who was soon to become Mrs. Jim? Is business good? Where can we get a drink?"

Jim replied satisfactorily to the last two questions, but neglected to say anything about the little lady, and Skid stored that up in his memory and went out to look at the town. This did not take a great while. Lombard was and is peculiarly similar to several thousand other towns, except that it has its own personal lake, with an island in the middle.

After supper at the hotel, Jim and Skid sat out upon the veranda, and Skid again touched upon the little lady. He could see that Jim was in the throes of something painful, and his suspicions were aroused.

"Jim," he said, "this afternoon you neglected to answer my query in regard to the lady, and I have been wondering if your present unbecoming dejection is due to some slight misunderstanding."

It is characteristic of Skid that he can meddle directly in such matters without being killed, and Jim smiled sourly.

"You need wonder no longer," he said. "There is no misunderstanding, I assure you. Ann Temple has made it perfectly clear to me that I have been supplanted by a stock actor named Bert Eno. This Eno is summering here, and he is notable for his sparkle and wit and vivacity. I don't know that I blame Ann much. She is a wonderful young woman, and I'm rather slow and old-fashioned. Only, I can't help thinking this Bert Eno is a false alarm. I'm afraid for Ann, Skid."

"That's a right nice way to put it," said Skid. "I don't know this Eno, but any

stock actor who would deliberately summer in Lombard is no good. I shall have to look into it, Jim. Nice girls are too scarce to throw away, and if you aren't mean enough to win her from any one named Eno, I'll see what I can do for you. I am a scheme specialist, and an expert at taking care of every one's business but my own."

Which was true enough, and partially explained why he had played forty-one engagements in two years.

Jim did not like the idea at all, but Skid laughed at him, asked him if he wanted Ann Temple to ruin her young life, and insisted on meeting Mr. Eno that very night. He found the latter a tall, good-looking, flamboyant individual, with number twelve shoes, a palm beach suit, black, curly hair, and a restless mouth.

"Nope; no good," said Skid, alone once more with Jim. "Why, I'd marry Ann myself rather than see her wrecked on the shoals of that Eno's grossness—and I haven't seen her. You want her, don't you, Jim?"

"Absolutely."

"Well, then, we'll see what can be done. I'm astonished at you. You don't deserve her—a nice girl like that!"

Skid lay awake half that night battling with his old friend's problem, but no inspiration came. The next morning, however, he took Jim's rowboat, rowed to the island, lay down on his back in the sand, and, after an hour or so, hit upon a likely scheme, if Jim would only agree to it.

Jim had a dandy little cottage at the upper end of the lake, and Skid's plan necessitated a week-end party at the lake-end cottage, with Jim and himself as hosts to this Ann Temple and Bert Eno, and another charming young lady whom Skid had in mind. Skid presumed that Ann had a mother, or some such encumbrance, who would be a perfectly lovely chaperon. He had an idea that such a week-end would prove enlightening to the deluded Ann, particularly if he could persuade Mae Burke to come on and give him a lift.

Mae was, according to Skid, a little devil; good, but a devil, nevertheless, inasmuch as she persisted in innocently

vamping every male human being with whom she came in contact. She was a pretty, sprightly miss, who had soubretted with Skid in several companies, and was now, he knew, sojourning with a sister in Dubuque. Mae possessed remarkable ability to lead men around by the nose. She was irresistible, and could have been married twice a week for the past four years without any difficulty whatever, had she so desired. She liked Skid immensely, because he was the only man in the world who did not like her and made no secret of it.

So, with his plan in mind, Skid rowed back to Lombard and succeeded, after an hour's oratory, in persuading Jim Baker that nothing in the world would give him so much pleasure as to play host at his lake-end cottage to four people whom he did not in the least care to entertain.

And so it happened that some days later Mrs. Temple and Ann and Mae Burke, with Jim and Bert and Skid Smith, foregathered at Jim's cottage for several days of uninterrupted hilarity. Ann and Bert had unsuspectingly grasped at the opportunity to be isolated from the world free of charge for several days; Mama Temple had come along in obedience to Ann's command; and in response to Skid's letter, explaining the situation, and begging her to come and enjoy herself in the happy task of restoring Ann to Jim Baker, Mae Burke had wired:

What a lark. I will knock them dead.

Which, translated, meant that if Bert could be true to Ann over the week-end, he was a most extraordinarily abnormal male human being, and deserving of even Ann. And Skid, who had seen Ann but once, had concluded that could not be.

The second time he saw Ann was the day she arrived at Jim's cottage, and he at once reached another conclusion, namely: that Jim Baker was no more deserving of her than was Bert Eno; and he wondered if, after all his travels, he had at last found the only woman in the world whom he could conscientiously allow to take care of the furnace and fry his morning eggs, sunny side up. So strongly did Ann impress him

that he had to get in the rowboat and talk to himself for an hour to keep from double-crossing his old friend Jim right at the start.

Ann had red hair, creamy skin, pearly teeth, blue eyes, and a figure that would have made Venus look like a Rock Island water tank. And when she smiled, which was frequently, Skid had to close his eyes and picture the coast of Mr. Hudson's Bay to avoid melting. His pulse became dangerously active, and his temperature one and one-half degrees beyond human aid.

Mae Burke, on the other hand, was a petite, black-haired, serpentine beauty, who could strangle most men to death by merely looking at them. She arrived in a gown that did not miss her a quarter of an inch at any point, and Mama Temple clucked once and went into the house where she might faint comfortably.

Mae deliberately shot Bert and Jim through the heart, but had no effect whatever upon Skid, and stamped her foot petulantly.

"Skid," she said, "if I ever manage to create a flick of your eyelash I'll die happy."

"I won't," retorted Skid. "That's some costume they've poured you into, isn't it? Will it expand, or do you use a crowbar? How are you, anyway? I don't think this Bert Eno will fall for you worth a cent. Please be as circumspect as possible or we'll lose our chaperon. Flirt all you please with Jim Baker, just as I've posted him to do with you, on the chance that Miss Temple still likes him a bit and will get jealous; but if you really get him interested, I'll drown you without compunction. How do you like our cottage? If Miss Temple's look may be relied upon, I'll ship your body to Dubuque Saturday. I hope you have a nice time, but I hardly think so. Isn't the water beautiful?"

Having thus done all that was necessary to insure an interesting time, Skid went into the cottage and reassured Mama Temple.

"Mae is a very nice girl," he told Mama truthfully. "She is as good as gold, and all that, and is perfectly harmless in the long run. When she was a small girl some

kind lady told her that she would live to win a thousand masculine hearts, and Mae believed her. She is still short about one hundred and nineteen, and is merely doing her best before she gets crow's feet and gray hair. So far she has not been stirred, nor wrecked a home, and is no more to be feared than golf or tennis, and not half so tiresome."

It is impossible not to believe Skid, and Mama Temple brightened.

The following day, which was Friday, Skid observed with some gratification that Mae had apparently mesmerized both Bert and Jim. Of course Jim was just playing a part, but Bert, unaware of the conspiracy, was so adroitly manipulated by Mae that Skid and Ann were sequestered for some time on the cottage porch. Bert had really tried to be left alone with Ann, but feared that that was not to be. Mae had a way of obtaining what she desired, and without actual discourtesy he could not avoid her web.

So when she suggested a trip to the island, while Ann discovered a convenient headache, Bert floundered helplessly and found himself walking toward the boat-house, with Mae tightly grasping his arm. Jim needed no urging, and no doubt Ann's mind was being disabused of the fixed belief that he was a quiet, old-fashioned gentleman with gout in one foot and an enlarged liver.

"There goes a wonderful girl," said Skid as he and Ann sat on the porch and watched the three row toward the island. "She has a magnetic personality which is irresistible. Jim is quite a sprightly youth, isn't he? Of course you could expect that of Bert. He is an actor, and the life is conducive to irresponsibility. I am of it and I know. That is why I do not marry. No actor is worthy of a lovely girl unless he stops acting, and I would blush with horror to take a good girl on the road. How large a town is Lombard? Have you ever been in Sioux City?"

"I had thought," said Ann timidly, "that the stage had lost its degenerating influence. I did not know—"

"So it has; so it has," interrupted Skid. "To an extent. Nevertheless, it's a care-

less life, and the grossness of human nature there crops forth. There is some hope for the man who will leave it. I have always liked red hair. Is Bert a very old friend? Jim has lived here a good while, hasn't he? Do you swim? I lived in Cleveland when I was a boy. You have wonderful blue eyes, haven't you?"

Ann smiled at this point, and Skid Smith sank without a murmur. He entered a momentary tussle with his conscience and succeeded so well in whipping it to a standstill that when Mae and her two victims returned from the island, he actually smiled at her and glared malevolently at Bert and Jim. He was going to save Ann, not only from Bert, but from his old friend Jim as well; and in pursuance of this alteration in his plans he led Mae down to the boat-house for an added injunction.

"I'm pleased to discover that you have lost none of your old-time form," he told her, "but I've changed my mind about one thing. If you will enlarge your activities to earnestly include Jim, I'll make you a present of a new pair of shoes, with Louis heels; some silk stockings, and two georgette blouses, to say nothing of a small gold wrist-watch. You are a right smart young woman, Mae, but I doubt your ability to sidetrack Jim. If you marry him it will be all right with me. Did you bring a bathing suit? That's fine! Knowing you as I do, I have no doubt it will look well by moonlight. Don't you think Bert and Jim would love to bathe from the pier about ten to-night? I wonder if Miss Temple would enjoy seeing you cavort with them in the water. She's an old-fashioned girl after all, thank the Lord. Perhaps she's too much for you. Are you going to play summer stock?"

"Yes, yes! I wonder! No, I hardly think so," smiled Mae. "You never yet had money enough to buy the collar of a V-cut georgette blouse."

Skid's grin was expansive as he reached into a hip-pocket and drew forth the equivalent of one car-load of cold-storage eggs, and Mae fell against the side of the boat-house. When she recovered she gave Skid a detailed account of her taste in wearing-apparel, and went back to the cottage.

Skid sank down in the sand and gave himself over to pleasant fancies. Friendship was one thing, but Ann Temple was another; and no man, Jim Baker or otherwise, deserved Ann unless he could win her. Skid's name was not John Alden, and history was not going to repeat itself in this instance.

Ann's innate refinement and faith in mankind were about to receive a stupendous shock, if Skid knew anything, and Ann could be made to turn to him as a man above such weakness. Then he would marry her and open a delicatessen in Lombard, and would even go so far as to buy his shoes of Jim Baker.

Mama Temple was a problem to be solved in due time, and there was a faint possibility that she might yet fall into the deep, green waters of the lake. As for Mae and Bert—poof! And as for Jim Baker—was he double-crossing Jim any more than Jim was double-crossing both Ann and Bert?

After which Skid returned to the cottage, grinned good naturedly at every one, and dared Ann to take a boat ride with him. And Ann, piqued to the extreme limit of human endurance by the crass exhibition of masculine weakness, as depicted by both Bert and the heretofore supposedly slow-gaited Mr. Baker, smiled at Skid and assisted him to the boat-house.

"Isn't it a lovely day?" asked Skid as they pulled from the shore. "How is it that you are constructed as other women and yet look so different? Two weeks from to-day I am going to ask you to marry me."

"Oh! But you mustn't!" gasped Ann. "I—why, I'm—"

"I know," grinned Skid, "but you won't be by then. Have you ever spent a honeymoon in Kansas City? Personally, I like a William and Mary dining-room suite, but it doesn't make a great deal of difference. How old is your mother?"

Two or three times Ann tried to step on his ambitions, but to no avail; and finally she merely smiled at his easy flow of English, than which she could have done nothing more deadly. The mere detail of marriage was all that intervened, and

Skid's grin was ample when they rejoined the group on the porch, where Mae was idly patting Bert's shoulder with one hand and rumpling the idiotic Jim's hair with the other. Mama Temple had taken her thoughts within doors where they rightfully belonged.

All in all it was a highly successful day. Once Bert succeeded in being alone with Ann for about three minutes before he was interrupted in a lengthy explanation by Mae; and his harangue was of small avail. It was evident that Ann regarded him as a fallen creature, and Skid found opportunity to ask her if she liked the rooms all on one floor, or preferred a two-story bungalow. Skid also had a word alone with his old friend.

"Jim," he said, "you surprise me! You should be an actor. If you play up to Mae hereafter as you have so far done, you need have no fear that Ann and Bert will clasp hands before a man in a black frock coat. Do you care for the way Mae arranges her hair? Most men find it very easy to like her."

"I can well believe it," said Jim; and Skid regarded him wonderingly and walked away.

To give Bert credit, he apparently did his best to combat the witchery of Mae, which of course did not go unnoticed by that young woman and made her more determined than ever. She had no intention of being humiliated by a girl of Ann's caliber, particularly before Skid Smith, who would laugh scornfully and very likely tell her that she was growing aged, and that he was pleased to discover another man who had intelligence of the same high order as his own.

Now Mae was really a very nice girl, but in her profession girls are readily recognized as portions of the scenery, and false modesty is unknown. And Mae loved to swim, but found it difficult when impeded by dress goods. As a consequence, her bathing-suit was built for utility, and occupied so surprisingly small a space in her trunk that it could be found only after a microscopic search. It was a vest-pocket bathing-suit, and was very easy to wear, allowing the utmost freedom.

Mae had this in mind when, at nine thirty that night she suggested a moonlight aquatic party. All but Mama Temple were agreeable, and mama sat on the porch and smiled as Skid, Bert, Jim, and Ann came from the house in the order named and went down to the water.

But when Mae finally emerged from the cottage, mama did not smile. She gasped once and looked at the moon, which grinned at her and seemed to close one eye slowly. But even mama had to admit that Mae was a pretty picture in a bathing-suit notable for the parts which had not been added to it.

"I never saw one made out of a hair-ribbon before," said Skid as he met Mae at the pier.

"They wear them at Palm Beach," retorted Mae defensively.

"Yes; and there was a man murdered there last season," said Skid. "I didn't know you could buy silk jersey by the inch. If you can't swim in that you can't swim."

After which brilliant interchange Mae plunged into the lake and Skid sat on the pier awaiting Ann, whom he felt certain would soon join him.

He did not have long to wait. Mae started the performance by diving beneath the surface and upsetting Bert, whose head struck the head of Mr. Baker. After that, both gentlemen chased Mae, caught her, and ducked her beneath the waves. Then Mae insisted on diving from their hands, and then from Jim's shoulder, to which eminence she must, of course, be assisted by Bert. And Ann paddled in to the pier from her lonely spot in the lake, and sat down beside Skid.

"Rather a silly way to utilize perfectly good water," he observed, with a glance into Ann's eyes, in which was reflected an almost overwhelming desire to cruelly murder two or three people who were superfluous to her scheme of things.

"Disgusting!" snapped Ann. "If it were not for you, Mr. Smith, mama and I should return home to-morrow!"

"Oh, please don't think of such a thing," said Skid. "Jim, you know, has to play the genial host, and Bert really can't help himself. It's hard to escape Mae, and she



doesn't mean any harm; it's just her way of enjoying herself. Do you care for a large church wedding, or a small affair at home, with a few friends present? I suppose your mother has relatives whom she can visit frequently? Were you ever married to a high, thin man who ran a delicatessen?"

So he chattered on, and Ann smiled and calmed down considerably; although later, as the party returned to the porch, Skid heard her hiss a furious "Beast!" into Bert's left ear. This startled him somewhat, signifying, as it did, the need of desperate measures. And while every one else was presumably asleep, Skid lay awake planning an extreme coup for the following evening. He was grinning contentedly when he fell asleep.

Early the next morning he called Mae to one side for her daily instructions.

"Now, to-day," he said, "I would appreciate it immensely if you would hold yourself in check in so far as is humanly possible. Try to calm yourself, or we will not have any more house party—and think of the fun you will miss! But to-night, Mae, I wish you would persuade Bert to row you over to the island; say just at dusk, when the leaves on the trees are whispering softly. Then you and Bert sit under a tree for thirty minutes, at the end of which period you may come home."

"Why not Jim also, or instead?" Mae pointedly inquired. "I like Jim—"

"So do I," interrupted Skid, "but I am now convinced that Jim contains no element of danger, while Bert is still influential in certain quarters. Jim won't think anything of it; I'll fix that. I'll take care of everything, and it will be the last favor I ask of you. Do you know anything about the delicatessen business? I wonder if you'd like one of those new beaded-bags. Do you expect to return to Dubuque?"

"No!" snapped Mae. "I'll do it—this once—because I agreed to. But I'll hate you as long as I live!"

"For mercy's sake!" said Skid, astonished beyond measure. "What in the world has altered your charming disposition? I don't care for you a great deal, more than you are going to care for me.

Won't that be lovely? Do you want a blue beaded-bag, or would you prefer some other shade?"

"I don't want anything," retorted Mae, "except to finish this horrible farce I agreed to. I'll live up to my bargain, but I wouldn't accept your old shoes, or stockings, or anything—if—if I had nothing to wear but that bathing-suit!"

Then she turned and left him, and Skid stared after her, wondering if it was the water or something she had eaten for breakfast.

The day passed uneventfully and quite pleasantly. Mama Temple smiled a great deal, and Ann's eyes grew beautifully soft, and everybody was normal. Then evening came—and dusk—and Mae came abruptly to life and resumed her devilishness which had been discarded since early morn. She started in with Jim, deserting him after a short period for Bert. And inside of fifteen minutes she was dragging Bert toward the boat-house and insisting that he row her about in the moonlight. It mattered not at all that the moon was not in evidence, and she did it so ingenuously that Bert could not refuse and still look upon himself as a gentleman. Skid grinned at the others.

"She'll never grow up," he apologized for her. "Just a child, that's all—and a spoiled one. I wonder what a marriage license costs. Did you ever know a man to fall in love at first sight—honestly?"

Then he got up and wandered away alone; and as darkness fell he might have been seen in Jim's second rowboat pulling quietly for the island. The sky was black with clouds, and Skid was whistling softly and wondering if there was a vacant house in Lombard with built-in kitchen cabinet and book-shelves.

Skid had had a very good reason for requesting Mae to sit with Bert under a tree for thirty minutes. The only trees on the island were clustered together in the approximate center, and there was a long stretch of beach and a luxuriant growth of long reeds between the water's edge and the trees.

As Skid reached the beach he was somewhat relieved to discover that Mae had

done her part exceedingly well. The row-boat was drawn up on the sand, and there was no sign of Mae and Bert. It was evident that Mae had followed his instructions to the letter.

There was nothing intricate about this extreme coup of Skid's, and why he had been obliged to lay awake for any length of time to conceive it, it would be difficult to say. All that he did when he reached the beach was to step out upon the sand, tie a rope which he took from his pocket to the other boat, fasten the line to his own skiff, and slide both boats to the water's edge.

After which he grinned at the trees in the approximate center of the island, climbed into his own conveyance and rowed hastily back toward the cottage. In a few moments, however, he untied the rope, setting Bert's boat adrift, and shoving the line into his pocket, blithely proceeded on his villainous way.

Bert would undoubtedly feel aggrieved. He had pulled his boat to a point a good ten feet from the water, and would feel justified in the belief that there had not been a tidal wave while he sat under a tree. But he would not know whom to suspect or accuse.

Mae might be expected to rave a good deal, and would most certainly know who was the tidal wave, but she would hardly dare come right out with it and accuse her co-conspirator. As Jim's guest, it would place her in a rather difficult position, and make her appear as a scheming adventuress who was an accessory before the fact.

Mama Temple and Ann would believe that it was a put-up job on the part of Bert, who had been acting peculiarly, to say the least. Skid felt that if he could not make them believe that Bert had deliberately set adrift the boat, he was losing his grip and should consult an alienist. And he would save Mae by persuading them that Bert was a scoundrel who had duped an innocent young girl from Dubuque.

Then Ann would shortly become Mrs. Skid Smith, wife of the prominent delicatessen magnate—and what became of Bert and Jim was of small consequence and worried Skid not at all.

All in all, no harm would be done, and Ann would thank Heaven daily for a fond and homely husband who was decidedly vamp-proof.

It was a lovely scheme, nearly up to Skid's asinine standard; and he was at peace with the world when he drew his boat into the shadows and made his way to the porch by a circuitous route.

"Where in the world have you been?" growled Jim unpleasantly.

"Me? Oh, I wanted to think," Skid replied easily. "So I walked back through the timber and sat down on a log. I'm going to settle down in Lombard—go into business, and I was doing a little mental calculation. Do they keep pies in a delicatessen? I wonder how you buy liverwurst, by the yard?"

Mama Temple thought pies were a part of a properly conducted delicatessen; Ann and Jim thought they were not. And no one knew anything about liverwurst except that it was a thing to be avoided.

So Skid led the conversation into other channels, apparently unconscious of the fact that as time passed both Ann and Jim were growing in nervousness and ill temper. Finally Jim sprang to his feet.

"They've been gone two hours," he said crossly. "I don't like it; I don't like it at all. Maybe something has happened to them."

"My gracious!" said Skid. "I'd forgotten all about them! Let's take the other boat and look for them. Why, they might be drowned, mightn't they?"

"I doubt it," said Ann; and Mama Temple supplemented that with the observation that it might be well if they were, and she, for one, was quite comfortable on the porch.

So Ann and Jim and Skid set off alone to search the waters for the delinquents. First they rowed toward town, and then they rowed due west for quite a while, and finally they straightened out for the island.

"They may have put in there," suggested Skid, "and their boat may have drifted off, leaving them marooned. But why should they put in there? If it wasn't so dark we could see clearer, couldn't we? I wonder if they call those pickle barrels you

see in a delicatessen store, kegs or hogs-heads? Do you know how to make angel-food cake, Miss Temple?"

By then they were near the island, and a faint shriek came to them across the waves. Ann gasped, and Jim said something for which he later apologized. Skid grinned and bent to his oars, and in a few moments the boat grounded at the feet of two very damp, indignant week-enders, who sputtered unintelligibly while Jim and Ann stepped ashore.

Skid was about to also step ashore, but hesitated when Mae Burke from Dubuque suddenly became coherent. At that time she was within the shelter of Jim Baker's encircling arm, and Skid was astonished to note that she seemed to belong there.

"Oh! O-o-h!" she shrieked. "It wasn't him, Jim, dear—" and here she pointed to Bert. "It was him—" and at this point she signified Skid Smith.

Gracious goodness!" said Skid, utterly amazed. "What in the world is the matter?"

"Matter!" said Mae, and left her shelter to face Skid across the gunwale. "Matter! Here you go and try to take from me the one man in the world I ever loved; and Jim loves me, don't you, Jim? And we're going to be married—so there!" And at this interesting point she faced Ann. "You thought you could get him back, didn't you?" she calmly demanded. "Well, you can't! He thought he loved you, and Skid framed up this whole party so you would turn against Bert, and then he decided to double-cross Jim and take you himself. It

was all my fault. I promised Skid to— to vamp Bert, and likewise Jim; and I did it—and I'm sorry, because Jim knows now that he never loved you. He loves me and you can't have him! I know Skid Smith well enough to bet a steam yacht that he left you just after we did, and that he set our boat adrift himself, feeling sure I'd back him up. Didn't he leave you?"

Ann nodded, and Jim growled, and Bert whispered something which it was just as well no one understood. Then Bert said aloud:

"Heaven knows, Mae, what would have happened had you decided not to fall in love with Jim. As it is, I have no doubt that in the course of ten or fifteen years Ann will feel it safe to allow me the freedom of the front yard. Her mother objected mildly, and we were secretly married two weeks ago, hoping to finally persuade mama that I am, in part, respectable. Now I'm not so sure. Anyway, all that Jim and I need do now is to quietly murder this Skid Smith with a certain amount of gusto."

Then he and Ann and Mae and Jim turned to face the waters, and four groans floated out to Skid, who was rowing steadily into the west in the boat which might have carried them back to the cottage after Skid had been foully done away with.

It was thirty minutes later when Skid stepped ashore and set off afoot in the general direction of Chicago. He was still grinning good-naturedly, and was on the way to his forty-second theatrical engagement.

## ROMEO AND JULIET

BY ISABEL REDCLIFFE

SO great their perfect trust and faith,  
 Death turned their loss to gain;  
 They never knew love's bitterness,  
 Nor felt its utter pain.  
 But I, who sit alone and weep,  
 Shall never know the bliss  
 Of living once upon your breast  
 And dying on your kiss!

# The Wings of the Snow

by Paul L. Anderson

Author of "The Cave That Swims on the Water," "The Lord of the Winged Death," etc.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE RIVALS.

"THREE moons hence shall each bring to me a figure, the figure of the Star-Marked One, bride of O-Ma-Ken, the Great Father, friend of lovers. Carven shall the figures be from the tooth of Do-m'rai, the Hill That Walks; of purest ivory, as befits the Star-Marked One. To him whose figure is best shall my hand be given; with him will I go as bride to his cave."

The speaker was a lovely girl of some twenty years, Then-ai, the Lance of Dawn, daughter to Nan-a-ta, Great Chieftain of the People of the Mountain Caves. It was not the custom among the tribe for women to take "warrior names" on reaching maturity, but sometimes in the case of a chieftain's daughter, or one who had performed some notable act, this was done, and here the name fitted well, both for the beauty of the girl and for the straight, slim grace of her skin-clad form, her bare arms and legs glowing rosy in the firelight as she stood erect and proud in her father's cave, her brown eyes shining in the flickering light of the fire and the oil-fed lamps of stone that swung suspended from the roof.

Beside the fire sat the great chieftain himself, nodding the approval for which his daughter looked as she finished speaking, and fronting her across the flames were two young men of the Ta-an, youths of her own age, the suitors to whom she had issued her command.

These young men, tribal companions of Then-ai, were by name Ku-ro, Carver of Ivory, and Tu-sen, Maker of Figures, and their unmutated hands, together with their lances—"warrior's weapons"—marked them as members of the artist clan.

When a tribesman was inducted at maturity into his chosen clan, whether warrior, artist or priest, hunter or fisher or artisan, part of the ceremony of induction consisted in the solemn striking off by the chief priest of one or another of the youth's fingers, that all might know his clan; the artists alone, most honored of the clans, kept all the fingers uninjured.

Ku-ro and Tu-sen had for some three years been rivals for the hand of Then-ai, nor had she been able to choose between them; her father somewhat favored Tu-sen, but none might coerce a chieftain's daughter in her choice of a mate—even her own father might do no more than advise, and though many among the youths of the tribe had sought the Lance of Dawn, only to be sent away discouraged and downcast, it was now known to all men that the race lay between Ku-ro and Tu-sen, nor could the maiden decide.

Gentle at heart, and reluctant to wound one who loved her, yet was she proud as became the daughter of the great chieftain, and now at length she had resolved to let the rivals, each known for his skill in carving, contest for her favor; none might wed Then-ai save the loftiest!

Bowing in acceptance of the task, and bowing again in honor to the great chief-

tain, whose fierce, stern face was now lit with a humorous aspect as he watched the artists, the two turned to go. Suddenly Nan-a-ta spoke, and they halted, listening respectfully.

"Three moons hence, as speaks the Lance of Dawn," he said. "And at the Rock of Council, as befits the daughter of a chieftain, that all the tribesmen, there assembled, may see and know her choice. It is said!"

"It is said," replied Ku-ro, and:

"It is said," echoed Tu-sen, and bowing once more, the young men left the cave, climbing down the rough ladder to the ground some fifteen feet below, and taking their way along the trail which followed the windings of the broad and placid river that watered the Valley of the Ta-an.

Then-ai watched them till they had vanished from sight in the dusk, then turned to her father.

"Is it well done?" she asked, and the chieftain answered gravely and tenderly:

"It is well done, daughter of mine! Naught can be more honorable than to carve well the form of the Star-Marked One, nor is there greater honor than in carving well the tooth of Do-m'rai! Three moons hence shall see the Lance of Dawn in her husband's cave!"

The girl blushed rosy red, and turned quickly to take from a shelf of rock the bundle of skins which served her as a bed, while the chieftain chuckled to himself. Presently he, too, spread skins of wolf and bear and leopard on the rocky floor, and lay down to sleep, and all was silent within the cave but for the crackle of the fire on the hearth.

Meanwhile Ku-ro and Tu-sen hastened along the path toward their caves, for the dusk was gathering in; even now the shadows lay black and heavy beneath the trees, and the leather-winged Devils of the Air swooped and fluttered about their heads. Soon the hunting beasts and the Devils of the Night would be abroad, and peril would dog their footsteps, so it behooved them to hasten.

Rivals though the young men were, apparent amity lay between them, a friendship which, so far as Ku-ro's feelings were

concerned, was real enough, but was not sincere with Tu-sen—it was merely a surface friendship with him, put on lest his enmity incline the Lance of Dawn to his rival.

Now, the cave of Tu-sen reached, he spoke in farewell, pleasantly enough, but as Ku-ro passed on toward his own home, Tu-sen, watching his rival's back, glowered angrily, his handsome face twisted and writhen with hatred and jealousy. He half raised his lance as if to hurl it at the other's back, then lowered his hand reluctantly, shaking his head and whispering:

"Nay, not thus! It would be known!" and turned to enter his cave. But as he turned his eye caught a glimpse of a dark form following stealthily along the trail behind Ku-ro, and he recognized the shape of Snorr-m'rai-no, the lion, the terrible Fear That Walks the Night, questing on the scent of the Carver of Ivory. Tu-sen shuddered, then smiled evilly to himself.

"Good hunting, Snorr-m'rai-no!" he said, and stepped into his cave. Presently through the forest came the snarling roar of a charging lion, a faint thrashing in the underbrush, and silence fell, even the faint night-sounds of the woods being hushed in terror at that awful roar. Tu-sen smiled faintly and said to himself:

"Perchance I need not carve the Star-Marked One after all!" and rolling himself in skins, he lay down to sleep. But sleep came not easily; his imagination pictured again and again that deadly rush and spring, the crushing to earth of Ku-ro, the carrying off of the torn and mangled body, and again and again he asked himself if it would not have been fairer, more manly, to warn the victim; Ku-ro would have done as much for him! But at last he put such thoughts from him in thinking of the Lance of Dawn, and toward morning he slept.

After leaving Tu-sen, Ku-ro had passed rapidly along the trail, hastening to reach the security of his cave. He had no least suspicion that he was being hunted, for Snorr-m'rai-no moves silent as a drifting shadow, so Ku-ro, despite his alert senses, caught no faintest pad of a footfall, no faintest whisper of leaves brushed aside.

But as he stepped into a little open space among the trees, a little glade where the forest drew back from the river to leave a grassy flat, almost beneath the young man's feet came a warning hiss, and instantly, instinctively, without conscious thought, he leaped aside from the Poisoned Slayer who lay before.

His bound carried him well to one side of the trail, and in that second the lion sprang. The intended victim had unconsciously evaded the leap, and Snorr-m'rai-no landed full and square on the serpent's coil. Frenzied, again and again the Poisoned Slayer struck, sinking his venomous fangs deep in the lion's flanks, in his breast—twice on his very nose!

Mad with pain and fear, the lion tore and tore at the death which harried him; again and yet again the Poisoned Slayer struck, but at length he died, rent and crushed by those terrible claws. But the lion, wounded to death, raging with the poison which burned in his veins like living fire, thrashed and tore and snarled, clawing the body of the snake to fragments, and snapping and clawing at his own body, striving to tear from it the torture within.

Ku-ro, shivering with horror, watched and listened from behind a jutting boulder, till at last the deadly venom took effect, and Snorr-m'rai-no, with one long-drawn gasp of agony, shuddered, fell prostrate, and lay still.

Ku-ro fell on his knees and gave thanks to the Great Father that he had been miraculously saved from two deadly perils—that each had annihilated the other, and he had been spared; then rising, he went slowly and thoughtfully to his cave.

It chanced that though Tu-sen had at hand a supply of ivory, Ku-ro had none, and he knew well that none was to be had within the Valley of the Ta-an; none of the tribesmen possessed it, except in the form of sculptures and ornaments such as bracelets and necklaces. Therefore Ku-ro must fare abroad and slay a mammoth, that he might get material for the figure which, he hoped, would win for him the Lance of Dawn.

Do-m'rai, he knew, was not a beast of the forest; rarely did he come within the

Valley of the Ta-an. His range was on the tundras, those vast and marshy plains, treeless, covered with coarse grass and scanty brush, which lay far to the north. Thither must Ku-ro travel, full ten days' journey from his home, in search of the Hill That Walks. Ten days out and ten back; allowing a week for the hunt, this would leave but two moons for the carving of the figure, and Ku-ro knew that he must hasten.

So the morning after his most happy escape he was early afoot; packed dried meat and roots and a handful of salt in a soft and smoke-tanned skin; took his weapons, bow and arrows, lance and ax and dagger, all oak-hafted, and armed with heads of chipped and polished flint, and set out over the mountains which closed in the Valley of the Ta-an on the northern side.

Ten days Ku-ro journeyed, early afoot and late to lie down, finding water in the little streams, gradually working through the thinning forest and out upon the plains, which in turn gave way to the barren tundra. Across this Ku-ro traveled, till at length on the ninth day he came to a water-course bordered with small and scrubby trees, hardly more than bushes.

Here he found tracks of the great beast he sought, a plainly marked and deeply trodden trail where Do-m'rai came down to drink. Across this trail Ku-ro dug a pit the height of a tall man in depth and width, twice that in length; upright in the bottom he set sharpened stakes. Two full days were spent in this labor, Ku-ro praying the while that the mammoth might not come till the trap was ready.

It seemed the prayer was heard, and at last all was finished, a woven mat of grass being laid over the mouth of the pit to hide it from the quarry; the mat was supported on small branches, and earth was spread down the middle to imitate the trail, lest Do-m'rai suspect danger and go around.

This done, Ku-ro set himself to wait, making a cold camp in the brush along the stream. Fortune favored him, and he had not long to wait; the very night after his labors were finished he was awakened by



the snorting and trumpeting of the great beast; peering eagerly out from his concealment, Ku-ro saw in the moonlight a herd coming in single file along the trail to the river, and he trembled, partly from excitement, partly from fear; he knew well that should he be discovered the hunter would swiftly become the hunted, and the Ta-an would look long for his coming.

But unsuspecting of danger, the vast bulks swung along, nearer and nearer to the trap, and Ku-ro fairly quivered with eagerness as he watched. Closer and closer, till the leading beast was on the trap—there came a rending noise, a squeal of terror, a crash, and the air was rent with a hell of noise such as Ku-ro had never imagined could come from living throat!

Squeals, trumpeting, snorts, groans, screams of agony, and plunging of the dying beast combined to rise in thunder to the silent sky. Terror-stricken, the others whirled about and fled, the earth shaking to their ponderous feet, and gradually the noise grew less and less, fainter and fainter came the sounds from the pitfall, till once more silence settled down, and naught was to be heard save only the rippling of the water and the sighing of the wind in the leaves.

In the morning Ku-ro went to inspect his prey, and found to his delight that he had trapped a cow. He was much pleased at this, for not only was the ivory much lighter—a tusk from a bull would make a heavy load for a strong man, but that of a cow scarce a quarter of this—but it was finer and firmer of grain—more difficult to carve, but more beautiful when finished, and Ku-ro knew that Tu-sen's store was of bull ivory.

Once more he gave thanks for his good fortune, then cut from the dead beast its tongue and roasted it over a small cooking-fire. Fed, Ku-ro cut out a tusk, shouldered it, and began the homeward journey, reaching his cave on the twenty-third day after setting out, the trip home being without incident of importance.

True, a serpent struck fiercely at him from its place of hiding in the long grass, and was pinned to the earth ere it could recoil; a leopard followed him for half a

day, to be driven off by an arrow which sang close to its head; and once Ku-ro, breaking into a little glade, came face to face with a huge bear which was tearing to pieces a tree in search of the wild honey stored therein.

Ku-ro, seeing that it was not a female with cubs, fronted the beast bravely as it rose, black and shaggy, to its hind feet, whereat the bear dropped to all fours and shambled awkwardly away. These, however, were but ordinary incidents of travel, and Ku-ro hastened home with his ivory, eager to begin the task set him by the Lance of Dawn.

For the two moons following, Ku-ro labored, carving the ivory with his best skill, cunningly; giving to it all of thought and knowledge that lay within him, beginning early and continuing late, for well he knew that his antagonist was not to be despised—that Tu-sen's skill was almost if not fully the equal of his own.

And so gradually the figure took shape under the trained hands and keen, flint tools of the artist, a statuette three palms' breadth in height, and when it was done Ku-ro was amazed to see that he had unwittingly carved a portrait of Then-ai, the Lance of Dawn, daughter to the great chieftain!

True, he had somewhat idealized it; it was, if possible, fairer than the original, but any of the tribesmen would recognize the likeness, and Ku-ro was in despair. Set to carve the form of a goddess, of the Star-Marked One, he had in his great love made a portrait of a mortal! And realizing this, Ku-ro set down the statuette and buried his face in his hands; deep sobs racked his frame, and through his fingers trickled the hot tears—Then-ai was lost to him!

Presently the first agony of grief passed, and he looked up; gazing despairingly about his cave, his eye fell on the mortar and pestle, roughly hewn of stone, which he used for grinding the colors for his wall-paintings. Dully he stared at them, and of a sudden, unbidden, a thought took form in his mind, growing till Ku-ro, drawn out of himself, rose and walked to the mortar, looking intently into it.

Slowly the idea grew, taking definite

form, and soon Ku-ro set to work grinding together red and yellow ochre till a tint was got something like that of flesh, and with this color, mixed with water, he tinted the figure, his enthusiasm growing as he worked.

The garment he left untouched, for the Star-Marked One wore ever the skin of the white leopard from the Country of the Snows, but the arms and face, the bosom and the legs, uncovered like those of the maidens of the Ta-an, he tinted till they glowed rosy as with the leaping, pulsing blood beneath the skin.

The lips he touched with red ochre, the hair with yellow, for the Star-Marked One was ever pictured in the tales as yellow of hair. The eyes, gray, he touched with a flake of soot from the lip of his stone lamp, mixing this, too, with water, and laying it on sparingly, and when he had done he took the figure reverently to the mouth of his cave, for by now the light was failing—and he gasped in astonishment; the ivory seemed fairly to live and breathe in his hands.

Doubtingly, as one suspecting a miracle, he touched the image with his fingers, almost expecting to feel it yield at the touch. But the ivory remained hard, and the feel of it reassured him, though none the less his heart raced and pounded and the blood throbbed in his temples as the knowledge grew within him that he had done what never before had an artist dreamed or wrought.

Reverently Ku-ro carried the statue back within the cave and placed it on the rocky shelf, laying a skin gently over it to protect it from view. This done, he rolled himself in skins and slept.

For the next three days Ku-ro remained within his cave, going not abroad, but waiting the summons to the Rock of Council. At last the word came, and the Carver of Ivory followed the messenger to the broad, open space beside the river, where were gathered the tribesmen in response to the call of Nan-a-ta.

Making his way through the multitude clustered about the flat-topped rock, Ku-ro came to where stood Nan-a-ta, Then-ai, and Tu-sen upon the rock. Leaping up,

he took his place, and the great chieftain raised his hand for silence.

"People of the Mountain Caves," spoke Nan-a-ta, "this day my daughter gives her hand to the one who shows the best-carved figure of the Star-Marked One, going with him to his cave as bride. Tu-sen, be it yours to show first your handiwork; People of the Mountain Caves, look well; yours is it to judge!"

Tu-sen strode to the edge of the Rock of Council, and lifted high the statue he bore; with his left hand he held it, while with his right he stripped from it the skin in which it was wrapped. A gasp of awe and amazement ran through the crowd, and many voices rose in cheers, "for in very truth the figure was of wondrous beauty.

Tu-sen flushed with pleasure and turned the figure about that all might see, then stepped back and laid the carving at the feet of Then-ai, who smiled on him. The chieftain nodded to Ku-ro, who in turn stepped forward, lifting high his work, slowly and reverently unwrapping the skins from about it and holding it aloft.

Until that moment the day had been dull and overcast; dark gray clouds had hid the sun, and all the valley lay under a spell of gloom. But as Ku-ro raised the figure the sun broke through the veil, and a shaft of light, sifting through the trees at the edge of the clearing, struck full on his arm and hand, gilding the warm and glowing figure which he held.

No sound broke the deep silence of the valley, and Ku-ro, amazed, looked down—they had cheered Tu-sen; surely some meed of praise might be his also! Then from the multitude came a hissing gasp of indrawn breath, and an old man, most revered of all the artists of the Ta-an, sank slowly to his knees, his arms outstretched in worship. One after another followed, still silent, till all the People of the Mountain Caves knelt before the Star-Marked One, and the heart of Ku-ro swelled within his bosom, and the tears flooded to his eyes.

He turned and laid the figure at the feet of Then-ai, and, wordless, the great chieftain lifted his daughter's hand and laid it, unresisting, in that of Ku-ro. The honored artist could see that the great chieftain

struggled to master himself, and at length Nan-a-ta spoke:

"It is said!" were his words, and he took the statue of Tu-sen and handed it to its maker.

Tu-sen trembled with rage, and his features grew black as a thunder-cloud, but he took the figure and turned toward the edge of the Rock of Council, as if to go. At the very edge he halted, swung about, spat out an oath, and dashed the statue against the rock, where it shivered in fragments. A groan of horror broke from the crowd—though rejected, yet was it the Star-Marked One—and the people, rising, parted a way for Tu-sen, drawing shuddering back from his path as fists clenched, face twisted in rage, he strode away. At the verge of the clearing he stopped, whirled about, shouted:

"Not mine, yet shall she not be yours!" and slipped the bow from his shoulders. Ere any could spring to stop him, ere Ku-ro could leap before the maiden, he had fitted an arrow to the string, drawn back the nock to his ear, and loosed! Straight and swift flew the shaft, burying itself deep in the bosom of Then-ai.

She uttered a little cry—clasped her hands to the wound—her head dropped back—she swayed and toppled forward into the arms of Ku-ro. He caught her, lowered her to the rock, and bent over her, crying her name in agonized voice. A trickle of blood flowed out along the shaft of the arrow, she opened her eyes, smiled faintly at her lover, and closed them once more. From Tu-sen came a mocking laugh, and Ku-ro, leaping to his feet, seized his lance and plunged wildly in pursuit, into the forest.

## CHAPTER II.

### INTO THE ABYSS.

**W**HEN the Lance of Dawn fell there rose from the crowd a cry of mingled horror and grief, for all loved Then-ai. Not only was she daughter to the great chieftain, and therefore to be respected, but she herself was most kindly and gracious, free from the slightest hint

of arrogance—pleasant to all, and friendly with every one.

So when Ku-ro dashed in pursuit of Tu-sen, the women and priests of the Ta-an pressed forward to give what aid they might to the stricken girl, and a score of warriors joined Ku-ro as he drove through the forest, hot on the flying footsteps of Tu-sen.

But soon it was apparent that the fugitive was not to be caught thus; swiftest of foot of all the young men of the tribe, he drew farther and farther from the chase, till at length even the sound of his flight was lost.

Still Ku-ro and his followers pursued, eyes to the faint trail, till the shadows of evening closed in and it became too dark to see. So they halted, and one of the warriors spoke to the little band, clustered together in the darkening wood.

"Nay," said Ken-ah, "thus shall we not overtake the murderer. Let us rather return to the homes of the Ta-an, securing food and preparing against a long hunt; then, taking to the trail, may we track him down and bring him back to die on the Great Altar, as befits one who slays a tribesman."

"Hear me!" burst out Ku-ro furiously. "Never will I turn aside for one least instant till Tu-sen dies by my hand! Flint and firestone have I in my girdle; also, a lance and bow and arrows. Food walks in the great forest; vengeance shall be mine! By O-Ma-Ken, the Great Father, I swear that I follow the track of the slayer of Then-ai while breath lives in my nostrils and my hand can be lifted to slay! Whoso comes with me is welcome, if he comes knowing that it is mine to avenge; whoso desires not to come may return—none faint of heart shall follow where I lead!"

Ken-ah was young and hot-blooded. At these words he sprang fronting Ku-ro, and answered angrily:

"None shall call me faint-hearted!" and he raised his ax. But Ku-ro motioned him aside, with the words:

"Not now. When I return will we fight if you so wish. But while Tu-sen lives I turn not aside from my vengeance for any man!"

There was some talk, some whispering, among the warriors, then one stepped forward and stood beside Ku-ro.

"I go," he said. "I, Menzono-nan, Son of the WOLF. Mine be it to aid Ku-ro!"

"I also!" cried another, leaving the crowd. "I, Do-m'rai-men, Slayer of Mammoths, if but Ku-ro will have me!"

But the remainder after further talk drew off, turning to go once more to the homes of the tribesmen. Ku-ro and his two companions made camp where they stood, ready to take up the chase again with the coming of daylight.

Long the Carver of Ivory lay awake, for it seemed as though a voice cried ever in his ears: "Dead! The Lance of Dawn is dead!" Over and over and over, dully, monotonously, unchanging, the voice repeated these words, till it seemed to Ku-ro that he would go mad; that he must scream and leap to his feet and run from the persistent, recurring sound, from the ghastly thought. Never to hold that lovely form in his arms, never to feel those soft lips against his own, or those arms about his neck! Never again to look into those brown eyes he loved so well!

And Ku-ro groaned aloud, rolling from side to side on the earth where he lay—had it not been for his vengeance he would have run on his lance and died in the forest! But his oath restrained him; that and his thirst for the blood of Tu-sen, and to himself he pictured the end of the hunt, when he, coming up with the fleeing man, should strike home, crying as he struck: "This for the Lance of Dawn!"

And his sorrow eased a trifle—the merest trifle—as he imagined the crunch and grind of the sharp flint blade, shearing and piercing through flesh and bone; never once did it cross his mind that his vengeance might fail; that he might come with- in striking reach yet not slay his enemy! So at long last he slept.

When light came once more to the forest, Ku-ro and his two companions, the Son of the Wolf and the Slayer of Mammoths, took up the trail again. They breakfasted lightly, on a hare which one of them slew, and set out in pursuit of Tu-

sen, following by the bent grass where his foot had trod, by the broken twigs of bushes, pressed aside in passing—at times by scent alone, for the hunters of the Ta-an had scent well-nigh as keen as a wolf's, and Menzono-nan was a famous tracker.

Often in the days that came did Ku-ro wish he had by him that marvelous trailer, Sar-no-m'rai, the Eyes That Walk By Night, of whom even yet tales were told among the People of the Mountain Caves. But Sar-no-m'rai had long been at rest in the burial cave far up the mountain, and the three must perforce depend on themselves.

It soon became apparent that Tu-sen was pressing eastward toward the Rising Sun, toward the High Mountains where lay the Great River of Ice, for though he twisted and turned to confuse his trail—thus proving that he knew of the pursuit—yet in the main the trend of his footsteps bore to the east.

At times the fugitive took to the water, wading up-stream along the Great River which watered the Valley of the Ta-an, or following its course down-stream. At such times the party split up, one going in one direction, the other in a different, each scanning closely the banks for sign where the hunted man had left the water, and signaling to the other by the howl of the wolf when the trail was found.

At times, too, the trail was lost when Tu-sen, coming to a rocky ridge, made his way along it, and then the party cast in a wide circle, seeking sign where he had left the rocks and taken once more to the softer going of the forest floor.

So day after day the hunt was out, pursuing ever while the daylight held, and it was soon evident that Tu-sen meant not to be taken without a struggle; that the pursuit held danger for hunters as well as for hunted.

One day as the three companions were pushing through a particularly thick mass of underbrush, where the tangled vines grew rank and close, impeding the feet, it chanced that Do-m'rai-men was in the lead. Suddenly he tripped over a strand of vine which lay across the trail, a foot or so above the earth, completely hidden.

He pitched forward, sprawling, and, as he did there came a crashing, rending noise, and with irresistible sweep and rush there descended from above a mighty tree-trunk, stripped bare of branches.

Tu-sen had halted in his flight long enough to set a trap, such a one as was used among the Ta-an for the slaying of the larger beasts, the bear, the lion, and the giant Beast That Wears a Horn On His Nose.

Warned by the noise, Ku-ro and Menzono-nan halted, frozen in their tracks, and the Slayer of Mammoths strove to roll from under the crashing death. But so cunningly had Tu-sen calculated, so skilfully had he wrought, that the ponderous mass fell directly across the hips of the prostrate man, pinning him to the earth.

Do-m'rai-men writhed and struggled in agony, and the other two at once fell to work to free him, laboring long with ax and dagger to dig him out, for the weight of the trunk was beyond their strength to lift—Tu-sen had felled the tree in its place, not hoisted it to a balance.

But when at last the young man was free he could not stand erect, all feeling was gone from his legs, and they knew his back was broken. He also knew his fate was sealed; even were he at home, among his folk, even did he live, never could he be aught but a helpless cripple, and here in the forest to live meant but to fall a prey to hunting beasts, or perchance—most terrible of all—to be eaten by vultures, for it was the belief of the tribesmen that whoso was eaten by vultures, his soul might never to all eternity reach the Place of Good.

So Do-m'rai-men begged the others to slay and bury him, freeing him from his pain and insuring him a place with his fathers. Bitter, indeed, was the thought to the two, yet they knew well that the greatest mercy lay in granting his prayer, and they drew lots to see to whom it would fall.

Two short twigs the wounded man held, one shorter than the other, yet so hidden that the ends which were seen appeared of the same length, and the others drew. To Ku-ro fell the shorter twig, and he

made ready his bow and arrow while the dying man prayed briefly to the Great Father. Then when the prayer was done, Ku-ro rose to his feet in preparation, but Do-m'rai-men called to him with extended hand.

"Farewell," he said. "Farewell; my thanks for your kindly stroke! And may all go well with you; may your vengeance strike home!" And he gripped Ku-ro's hand in sign of friendship and farewell. With Menzono-nan as well he shook hands, then dropped his arm and smiled through his pain, saying:

"Speed well the arrow of mercy, friend of mine!"

Ku-ro stepped back a pace and lifted his bow, but lowered it. Again he lifted it, and again his arm dropped, and he looked despairingly about the autumn woods, rich in their gaudy color, flame of maple and birch, glow of oak. From afar came the weird, mocking bark of a hyena, and from Ku-ro's throat burst a strangled sob.

"Nay, fear not!" spoke the wounded man. "Fear not, Ku-ro; it is a kindness you do!"

"Close your eyes!" gasped Ku-ro. "Close them tight, or I cannot!"

"Nay," came the reply; "should a warrior of the Ta-an fear to look on death?"

"In very truth, well do I know you have no fear! Yet while you look at me I cannot—I cannot set you free!"

Do-m'rai-men laughed, and flung his forearm across his eyes, and on the instant the merciful arrow sped. Ku-ro and his remaining companion labored through the hours of daylight to dig a grave and pile stones above it, that the body of their friend might rest secure from marauding beasts.

Next day the two took up once more the chase, hastening to regain the distance lost, and within three days once more a deadly peril threatened. Ku-ro this time was leading, and of a sudden he came to a halt, stopping short in his tracks, warned by some strange sense of danger.

He peered all about, but saw nothing out of the way; nothing at least that he could recognize. Yet the feeling of peril, of something threatening, was strong, and

he drew cautiously back, casting a circuit around the place where he had stood.

A few paces on he found what he sought—a stout sapling bent down across the trail, held by a thong of deer-hide, and in the end of this thong a noose, cunningly set above the trail, and so arranged as to tighten about the neck of one striding along; tightening, it would free itself from the trigger which held it, so releasing the bent sapling.

Three paces farther, and Ku-ro would have been caught—whirled into the air by the upspringing tree, to dangle, his neck broken, above the trail!

"In very truth," spoke Menzono-nan, "this is a crafty foe we seek!"

Ku-ro grunted, and with a stroke of his dagger severed the thong, the sapling leaping upward, thrashing against the near-by branches, scattering the dry leaves abroad.

That night Ku-ro and Menzono-nan slept on the ground. The freshness of the trail told them that they were drawing near their foe, and they grudged the time to wattle a platform among the branches. They knew it was dangerous to lie in the open; lion or leopard might follow their scent and spring upon them as they slept, but they chanced it to save time.

During the night—an hour or so before the dawn—Ku-ro woke to a faint noise in the forest. Eyes wide, but no muscle moving, he lay listening eagerly. "Pat-pat"—slowly, and then again "pat-pat," it sounded, like a deer browsing—yet not quite like. Puzzled, he listened; then as he was about to wake Menzono-nan, suddenly—*whir-r-r!* and an arrow buried its head in the ground close by his ribs, the shaft protruding, quivering.

Then Kuro knew what was the noise, and with a cry he leaped to his feet, seizing his weapons. His companion also was afoot, and arrow after arrow they sped into the darkness, only to be answered by a mocking laugh. They dashed in pursuit, but Tu-sen, fleet of foot, eluded them, and their frantic search and furious curses came to naught.

So the hunt went on for weeks, the two at times drawing near their enemy, the hunted man at times blinding his trail so

well that they were at fault. Gradually the long cold closed in, the leaves, fallen from dead branches, forming a rustling carpet under foot, and the dark gray clouds chasing one another day after day across the sky.

At length one morning Ku-ro woke to find the earth hidden under a light fall of snow, and he shouted aloud for joy—the trail would lie plain and clear! In all haste Ku-ro and his companion built a fire and cooked food, afterward casting forward and about till they struck the footprints of the hunted man. At once it became apparent that he also knew what the snow would bring, for he had struck straight eastward—no more turnings and doublings now—toward the high hills which reared their white peaks far off near the horizon.

Onward, ever onward toward the mountains led the trail, over low ranges of hills, down and across fair valleys, through brush which lined the streams, up again in ever-rising gradations, the high hills drawing ever nearer and nearer day by day! Onward, ever onward, now walking, now running, sped the chase, halting at times that the hunters might cast about and pick up the trail, partly obliterated by drifting winds or by light falls of snow, but always straight toward the mighty peaks where dwelt the River of Ice.

Never had Ku-ro been among these peaks, but many tales of them had he heard, and well he knew the desolation which lay there; well he knew that the chance of return was small for those who went unprepared, yet ever the bitter hatred, the lust for vengeance, urged him on.

Closer and closer to their prey the hunters drew, noting from the aspect of the trail and from the ashes of the fires that the hunt was near its end, and ever upward they climbed, till at length they found themselves fairly within the High Hills, hot on the footsteps of him they sought.

Twice, indeed, did they catch sight of Tu-sen, a tiny black dot crawling slowly over the snow, a mile or more in advance, and frantically they strove to close, but the fugitive redoubled his efforts and kept his lead.

And now the three, hunted and hunters, were traveling over the great River of Ice. They had passed from the bare and wind-swept rocks, climbing, clinging, slipping to the surface of that vast and mighty glacier, desolate, stern, implacable. They had scaled sheer cliffs and skirted deep precipices; they had cut foot-holds across glistening snow-fields, or had trodden in those Tu-sen had cut; time and time again they had missed death by the thickness of a hair, by the breadth of a knife's edge; and ever they drew closer to their prey.

Tu-sen was growing weaker; food was scanty—none was to be had save what they had carried from the low country—and, further, he must pick the way—the hunters could follow in his tracks. Yet even so Ku-ro feared lest the fugitive win across the great peaks to the valleys beyond, and lose himself in their twists and turns. So he drove himself fiercely, Menzono-nan following, though he lacked the urging fire which burned in Ku-ro's heart.

At last there came a morning when, rising from sleep on the bare ice, Ku-ro saw Tu-sen not more than a thousand paces in advance. He woke the Son of the Wolf, and together they hastened after the fleeing man, determined to close with him before night should close down.

"Forget not he is mine!" said Ku-ro, and the other nodded silently—both men were nearing exhaustion.

On they pressed, and on, and presently Tu-sen, rounding the shoulder of an ice cliff, was lost to view. The two were now crossing a long slant of frozen snow, digging their lances into the slippery crust to hold themselves from sliding—a slip, a fall, and the unfortunate one would have made a long glissade to death.

Of a sudden Kuro, looking up, uttered a startled cry and flung himself prone, clinging madly to the smooth crust. Menzono-nan did likewise, as from above, far up the slope, there hurtled down upon them a great block of ice, half the height of a man.

On it came, faster and faster, leaping, bounding, rushing upon them with irresistible force, driving like a thunderbolt!

Ku-ro saw that it was headed directly toward them—he closed his eyes—dropped

his head—clung—with crash and roar as of a thousand torrents the huge block struck—a muffled cry—something wet splashed on Ku-ro's hand—he lifted his head—and saw that he was alone on the blinding expanse of white.

Before him, where his friend had lain, a horrible splotch of red stained the snow—far down the slope the great block bounded and thundered—Ku-ro looked dazedly at his hand and muttered: "Blood!" and from above there floated faintly to his ears a jeering laugh!

That night Ku-ro made camp alone on the surface of the glacier. There was no fuel for a fire, and he ate sparingly of the frozen meat he carried, quenching his thirst with bits of ice melted in his mouth. In the morning he was afoot betimes, and managed to catch a glimpse of his enemy not more than a quarter of a mile away; he was cheered to see that Tu-sen had reached—or well-nigh reached—the limit of his strength—he was going on all fours.

Ku-ro sprang forward in pursuit, encouraged at finding Tu-sen's ax where he had flung it away to lighten his load—sure sign that the end was near. But as he stooped to lift it, his foot slipped, his ankle twisted under him, and with a grunt of pain he fell heavily, cursing.

A brief examination showed that no bones were broken, nor was the joint displaced, but when Ku-ro tried to rise an agonizing pang shot up his leg, and he fell again. He cursed furiously, realizing that he also must go on hands and knees, but doggedly he took up the chase, determined that this day should see the end.

So across the vast and pitiless River of Ice the two journeyed, the doomed man and the avenger, one racked by terror, one driven by the fiends of hatred and blood-lust; on hands and knees they crawled over the vast desert, slipping, falling, struggling ever onward; bleeding from raw wounds worn on knees and palm, or cut by the sharp edges of ice or snow-crust—ever onward through agony to death!

Ku-ro, glancing up, saw that Tu-sen had changed his course; instead of carrying on straight across, he had turned and was heading at right angles up the long slope.



Instantly the hunter swung to the left to intercept his prey, and soon he saw the reason for the change. Directly across the trail Tu-sen had taken there yawned a vast crevasse, ten spears' length from lip to lip—far too wide to leap—and Tu-sen sought for a bridge of snow on which to pass, even as he had passed other and smaller openings in the ice.

But Ku-ro miscalculated and failed to cut in front of Tu-sen, though the change had brought him within fifty paces of the latter, and glancing forward he could see Tu-sen's face, turned backward over his shoulder—pictured on it, hatred, despair, utter terror.

"More like hunted beast than man," thought Ku-ro, noting the blackened lips drawn back in a snarl from the white teeth, noting also the raw and bleeding cheeks, black from frost-bite, and the eyes, deep-sunk in the head, yet blazing with the flame of madness. And he chuckled to himself as he thought of his dagger driving between those gaunt ribs.

He flung his lagging forces into a desperate effort to close, but Tu-sen called up another ounce of strength, and held his distance, and now the long-sought bridge of snow was at hand. Broad and smooth it stretched from edge to edge of the chasm, and with a beastlike cry, half snarl, half gasp, Tu-sen turned to cross, mounting with bitter struggle the slight crown of the span.

Coming up, Ku-ro swung in on the bloody trail to follow, though his head swam at the thought of what lay below—darkness and depth and death! Shuddering, he drew back from the crossing and looked about, then gathered himself together and started once more—drew back again and looked around.

It was late afternoon, and heavy gray clouds covered the sky, precursors of a storm. All about stretched the merciless ice, broken by hummocks and ridges—far off, the mountains reared peak after peak white against the gloomy sky, far as the eye could see. In all that vast expanse no living thing was to be seen save only the two men, hurried and driven by fear and hate—the fugitive and the avenger.

Ku-ro shuddered at the relentless desert, and the feeling came over him that he, too, would die here—but first he must slay Tu-sen! He looked and saw that the gap between him and his prey had widened—with a snarl he flung himself forward to pursue—but halted, just in time.

From the bridge there came a strange groaning sound—a quiver—a creak—an agonized scream—and Ku-ro saw, like some strange picture, that the bridge was slowly changing its form. Instead of lying flat from brink to brink, it now sagged in the middle, and Tu-sen, clawing frantically, strove in vain to climb the slope that lay before him.

Wondering, Ku-ro drew back, eyes wide, and as he did there came a rending, tearing sound, the span sagged still further—Tu-sen slipped back—and with a snapping, crackling noise the hard snow gave—the bridge caved in and fell.

Ku-ro heard one awful, despairing scream—had an instant's glimpse of a dark form spinning downward, arms and legs awl—tons and tons of ice and snow hurtled into the crevasse—and before him yawned the empty air! Long after there echoed faintly from that vast abyss a muffled, deep-toned, thunderous roar—and silence settled over all, the utter silence of the mighty peaks, the silence of desolation, of the desert of ice and snow.

Ku-ro sank fainting on the very edge of the crevasse.

### CHAPTER III.

#### THE MIRACLE.

**W**HEN Ku-ro came to himself he found that he lay on the very margin of the frightful abyss into which Tu-sen had been hurled. At first his recollections were blurred and indistinct; he could not recognize where he was, nor could he remember how he came there or what had passed.

Gradually, however, his mind cleared and he recalled what had gone before. Head on one side, he lay prone and listened over the lip of the crevasse, but no sound drifted up from those awful depths; he

pictured to himself the mangled body of Tu-sen lying far, far below, and he shuddered at the thought.

He peered downward, but nothing was to be seen save the blackness of unguessed depth, and then for the first time Ku-ro noticed that the sheer walls of ice for some yards down glowed with a strange and ruddy light. He looked up and saw that the sun was setting and the whole heavens were aglow; rolling, billowing, the dark gray clouds swam in rounded masses athwart the sky, their lower edges blood-red from the light of the sinking sun.

"Snow comes," muttered Ku-ro, thinking how powerless he was to protect himself, thinking that for him, exhausted by the long hunt and weak from hunger, a storm would bring the end. And as this thought came to him another slowly took form and grew within his mind; why wait? Why lie like a stricken beast, suffering the tortures of the cold, till death came on leaden feet? Life held nothing for him; Then-ai dead, her death avenged, why should he live?

His father and mother were dead, brothers and sisters had he none—friends, indeed, but how long would they mourn for him? In very truth, did they not even now count him lost? A quick blow of his dagger would end his misery, would set him free to seek the Lance of Dawn—nay, simpler than that, one step forward—a swift rush through the air—and then—the end!

As he lay on the edge of the crevasse this thought grew and grew, taking possession of his mind, till at length it seemed the only thing to do, and slowly, wearily, aching from head to foot, his raw hands bleeding afresh as he rested his weight on them, Ku-ro got to his feet and tottered on the brink of the abyss—of eternity!

But even as he was about to take that fatal stride his eye was caught by something in the chasm; a faint swirl of mist, it seemed, rising toward the upper air, and he stopped to watch. Slowly, slowly, twisting, bending, gathering together, the mist took form, assumed a shape not unlike that of a human being, and Ku-ro stared, agape.

"Nay," he told himself, "this cannot be; the hunger brings visions!" And he

pulled himself together to carry out his purpose. But even as he did so, in the very act of staggering forward, he caught himself—halted—drew back, gasping—the mist had taken form, indeed, and Then-ai floated before him over the abyss, standing on empty air!

There was no mistaking that figure; the long and graceful limbs, the proud head, the large brown eyes, the long hair, clasped by a single thong behind the shoulders and below that flying loose—all spoke the girl Ku-ro had loved, and he stretched forth his arms to take her to his bosom. But the vision smiled and shook her head; her lips moved, but no sound came. Frowning, she tried again, vainly, and a look of pain swept over her features.

"Then-ai!" cried Ku-ro in despair. "Speak, Then-ai! What is it you would say?"

With the words the face of the vision cleared, the lips moved once more, and from them came the sound of words, faint and far away it seemed, yet clear and unmistakable—the very accents of the Lance of Dawn!

"Ku-ro," spoke the vision; "Ku-ro, best-beloved, not yours to die! Live; make your way back once more to the Valley of the Ta-an; need of you lies heavy on the tribesmen. Serve faithfully; so shall your reward be great; die now by act of yours, and never shall you clasp Then-ai, or here or in the Place of Good. It is the Great Father speaks, by me, His servant."

Ku-ro fell on his knees, arms outstretched, crying:

"It shall be done! Then-ai, loved one, even as you have said, so shall it be done! But oh, sweet one, pray to the Great Father that the trial be brief; that soon I may be free to seek you!"

The vision smiled, placing a finger on her lips, and the outlines of the figure blurred, wavering, so that Ku-ro, fearful, called out:

"Then-ai! Then-ai, you who come from the Place of Good to warn me, suffer that I may hold you in my arms but once ere you return!" Frantically, despairingly, he cried the words, but the vision smiled and shook her head; gradually the mist

faded, the form disappeared, and Ku-ro was alone among the icy peaks, but from afar there seemed to float in Then-ai's gentle tones:

"It may not be! Wait, my lover; not long!" And to his nostrils there drifted the faint perfume—well-remembered—which lurked ever in the hair of the Lance of Dawn.

Ku-ro fell prone upon the ice, and even as he did so the sunlight was blotted out by the dark clouds driving across the sky; a chill wind swept down from the higher peaks, and all about was hid from sight by the sudden rush and sweep of the blinding snow.

Ku-ro got to his feet and staggered a few yards from the crevasse, then sank down once more, utterly forespent. Over and over in his mind he turned the remembrance of the vision; Then-ai had come from the Place of Good to warn him! Surely the Great Father had need of Ku-ro! And the wisdom of the Great Father, sending the only messenger Ku-ro would heed!

Overcome by the thought, by the sure knowledge that the Great Father had him in mind—him, so weak, so little worth among the tribesmen—Ku-ro got to his knees and prayed, asking that he might in truth deserve this sign of favor, that he might well and truly serve the Ta-an.

Comforted by his prayer, Ku-ro took from his girdle the remains of a hare he had slain some days before and was saving, eating a little at a time, that it might last. It was a large beast of its kind, and more than half was left, frozen as hard as stone. This unappetizing meal Ku-ro gulped down, painfully chipping the frozen meat in fragments with his dagger and thawing it in his mouth till he could swallow. And for all that it was raw and frozen, never had he tasted aught so good!

Presently his stomach filled, the wolf no longer gnawing in his belly, the youth curled up and slept, falling into slumber with a gentle smile on his lips—the first in many a long day! And softly, silently, touching him almost with a caress, the white snowflakes drifted ever downward through the darkness, covering and wrap-

ping that silent form with a feathery mantle, a blanket which blurred and softened the outlines not only of Ku-ro's form, but of all surrounding objects as well; softly, silently, through the long night they drifted down, till when morning came the aspect of that place of desolation and death was changed well-nigh beyond all recognition by the curving outlines of the piled and mounded snow.

Two things saved Ku-ro's life—say, three. The vision, first; then after that the full meal, which stimulated his flagging strength and made it possible for him to sleep; last, the snowstorm. Men caught in blizzards rarely die of cold; frightened, terrified, they circle about until exhausted, whereas did they but lie down and rest till it ceased they would often be rescued.

Strange it seems, but snow falling over a sleeping man makes a warm protecting covering under which one sleeps well, resting, sheltered from the cold. And thus Ku-ro slept, though had he lain out on the bare ice, exposed to the wind, he had never wakened.

Full thirty-six hours he slept, waking at length to a dim gray twilight. At first he could not remember where he was, but soon memory came back with a rush; Tu-sen's death, his own resolve to die, the vision, the prayer, the food, these things grew clear, and he stood erect, shaking off the snow, resolute to hasten back to his own people.

As he rose and broke through the blanket of snow he was amazed to find that the storm had ceased and the flaming sun was just breaking over the eastern hills; the gray light to which he woke beneath the snow had caused him to think it yet dusk. But it was a glorious dawn instead; the blazing sun, the clear blue arch of the sky, the dazzling snow with its long blue shadows and sparkling lights, and all about the lofty peaks, rising in rank after rank as far as the eye could reach—these things seemed to Ku-ro a happy augury, a presage of good to come.

Again he prayed to the Great Father, and this done set his face away from the crevasse and toward the long journey back to the Valley of the Ta-an.

It was a perilous journey, in very truth. Ku-ro had not taken a hundred steps down the long slope ere he realized this to the full, for the snow, masking the surface of the underlying ice, hid from view the slight irregularities of the glacier's face, and slips and falls were frequent. Besides, his hands and knees were yet sore, though he noted with satisfaction that they showed signs of healing, and his ankle still pained from the wrenching it had received.

And how was he to get food? No living thing besides himself trod these mighty wastes! But he decided to trust the Great Father; He would not call a man and then desert him! Water lacked, but that was no matter, for Ku-ro knew not the superstition that snow increases thirst, so he ate freely of it, and his thirst was slacked.

One comfort there was, the storm had brought warmth in its train, and though the ice and snow were cold, the air was pleasant. So Ku-ro pressed on, plowing through the snow, seeking always the lower levels, working always downward toward the distant valleys, where he knew he could find food.

For two days he traveled thus, but presently the effect of his one, gorging meal passed off, and he found himself growing weaker; stumbling more often, rousing himself with greater and greater difficulty from rest, sitting down with ever increasing frequency, for that his trembling legs would not support him.

Several days passed thus, Ku-ro still struggling onward, and now he began to see visions. Food was the one obsessing thought which filled his mind, and about this all his dreams by night and his visions by day were centered.

Food! Had he ever eaten his fill? Had he ever in days past known what it meant to have his belly full? He doubted it; looking back, he could not remember the time when this ghastly feeling of emptiness, this agonizing pain, had not been with him.

One comfort, though; the pain was passing. The terrible agony of the first two days, when it seemed as though a wild beast gnawed and tore and clawed at his vitals—this was no longer with him, but in its place a sense of vacancy, of hollow-

ness, a feeling that he must lay both hands on his stomach and double over—this he had; and then that awful weakness, that dizziness, that swimming of the head, that failing vision!

These things tortured him beyond words, and to make it worse he could see and smell the cooking-fires of the Ta-an. He knew in the back of his mind that the Valley of the Ta-an lay many days' journey distant, yet could he see the fires, the pots bubbling, and smell the roasting meat, till the water dripped from his half-open mouth.

And at night he dreamed of food. All night long, from the closing of his eyes till he opened them at dawn, the thought of food was ever with him. Once he woke in the middle of the night, weeping bitterly in his disappointment, for though in his dreams he was never able to eat of the feasts spread before him, yet on this one occasion he had managed by desperate efforts to get a handful of berries into his mouth—and the unspeakable joy, the utter delight, had wakened him!

Finally came the day when youth and strength and courage and a desperate resolve could no longer bear up against starvation, against the exhaustion of long-continued labor without food. For some time Ku-ro had been marching on sheer nerve; his vision had been blurred by strange flashes of light, by whirls of color dancing before his eyes.

Vainly had he striven to brush them away that he might see where to set his feet; they persisted, and in consequence he had many times stumbled and fallen, often where the winds had driven away the snow, so that he fell with numbing shocks on the bare ice.

At last, toward the close of the day, as he struggled blindly on, reeling and staggering, he drove unseeing into a drift which lay knee-deep before him. His feet caught, he pitched forward and lay still. After a time he strove to rise, the indomitable spirit still urging him on, but though he got to his knees he could not lift himself further. He tried to press forward on all fours, but the snow hampered and blocked him, and he was forced to give over the attempt; pitching headlong, he lay full-length in the snow.

Often in battle the blow which slays is not felt; often, too, a mortal wound so numbs the senses that no pain accompanies the shock. So also when a man is dying of disease or exhaustion nature oftentimes administers an anodyne, sparing the victim the pangs of dissolution.

Thus was it with Ku-ro; he had suffered bitterly, it is true, but now that the end was at hand all pain left him. He no longer felt hunger; the pain of his torn and lacerated hands and knees had passed; the misery of frost-bite was no longer with him. Instead, a delicious languor spread over him, accompanied by a feeling of warmth, a glow of happiness—his sole discomfort a faint sense of wonder that the Great Father had saved him from the abyss to let him die thus, alone.

Soon this, too, passed, and Ku-ro gave himself over to utter relaxation, to rest, and the feeling of languor grew flooding over him in most heavenly peace. Fainter and fainter grew his sensations—fainter still—fainter—fainter—

Presently Ku-ro was aware of a bitter pain, of agony unbearable. His first thought was that he had died and gone to the place of evil—his next, that some one was thrusting red-hot needles of flint into his hands and feet. He struggled feebly to get away, but was held firm, and the pain continued. At length he opened his eyes to see men bending over him, doing something to him, and as consciousness flooded back he found that they were rubbing his hands and feet with snow.

And still the pain grew ever fiercer—agonizing, frightful—and Ku-ro writhed and screamed, fighting for freedom, but the rubbing continued, and by and by the pain grew less, then ceased altogether. One came forward and placed a steaming bowl to Ku-ro's lips and he drank eagerly of a rich broth, then relaxed once more. Dimly he felt himself being wrapped in furs, but nothing mattered; he was sleepy, rescue had found him, the Great Father had not deserted him after all!

And so Ku-ro slept, his last thought that a party of hunters from the Ta-an had stumbled across him and had brought him back from the journey into the long dark.

Long Ku-ro slept, waking at intervals to take food, and then sleeping once more, till finally nature felt herself restored, and vitality came again to the exhausted frame. Then Ku-ro, waking, roused himself and began to take an interest in his surroundings, learning to his utter amazement that his rescuers were not of the Ta-an.

Two watched him by day and night, and through questions he found that these were men of the Sur, a tribe akin to the Ta-an, living in the Great Hills far toward the rising sun, whence had come the Ta-an generations before, in the time of Snorr the Great Chieftain and Na-t'san, the Son of the Red God.

The tongue they spoke was not unlike that of the People of the Mountain Caves—near enough, at least, so that Ku-ro could after a day or two converse freely with them—and he learned that tales of the rich Valley of the Ta-an had drifted back to their former home, filling the Sur with desire for such rich hunting and for such an easy and pleasant life.

So the chieftain of the Sur, a warrior named Tho, had gathered a party of fighting men, had left the tribe in charge of his son, and with his party had set out in search of the Valley of the Ta-an, meaning to wipe out the People of the Mountain Caves and bring the rest of his people to that fair and lovely place.

The Ta-an themselves, when journeying to the Land of the Dying Sun, had taken a southern route, skirting the shores of the Great Blue Water, but Tho and his men had failed to find this way, and striking inland, had undertaken to cross the snow-crowned peaks into which his long hunt had led Ku-ro.

Finding the latter, Tho had realized that if one of the Ta-an—or even if not—he might prove a useful guide, so had given orders that the youth's life be saved if such might be. The Sur, before starting the long and terrible ascent, had got together—wise foresight!—food and firewood, so that it was possible for them to camp without too great discomfort on the Great River of Ice, and here they stayed for the few days required for Ku-ro to regain his strength.

All this the young man learned from his guards, for though well treated, he was still a prisoner. When finally strong enough he was taken before Tho for an interview, at the latter's command.

"Speak him fair yet boldly," advised Kas, one of Ku-ro's guards. "Cringe not, for Tho loves well a brave man, yet he not too forward, lest his temper flame at you, devouring."

Even in this brief time the frank and open manners of Ku-ro had brought his guards to like him, and they wished him well as they marched him between them to where sat Tho, Great Chieftain of the Sur.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### DEATH'S CAUSEWAY.

THO proved to be a big man, not fat, but tall, large-framed, and muscular, with a certain slow-moving feline grace suggestive of the lion—he could doubtless move swiftly enough should need arise. His face was scarred from wounds received in battle and the hunt, yet these gashes and weals served but to emphasize the stern ferocity of his aspect, a ferocity rising from the lean cheeks, the arched nose—like an eagle's beak—and the steady glare of his blue eyes.

He looked fixedly at Ku-ro for some moments before he spoke, and Ku-ro returned the gaze, unflinching, though it took all the courage he could summon to bear up under that piercing glance. Presently Tho spoke:

"Ku-ro you are called?"

"In very truth, great chieftain," was the reply, given respectfully yet boldly.

"Of the Ta-an?"

"In very truth."

"To our ears word has come that the homes of the Ta-an lie in a pleasant valley, rich in game, where life is not hard; is this indeed sooth?"

"The word speaks with a true tongue, great chieftain."

"Thither go we, there to make our home; messengers shall be sent to bring the women and children of the Sur. You shall be our guide."

"And how of the Ta-an, great chief-

tain?" queried the youth. Tho smiled grimly.

"What the Sur desire, that they take," he answered, and the stern warriors laughed approvingly.

Ku-ro closed his eyes. His quick imagination pictured the fair Valley of the Ta-an rent by the turmoil of war, the men slaughtered, the women and children prisoners in that slavery which is worse than death, and he shuddered at the awful thought.

"Nay, great chieftain," he cried, "this may not be! Not for me to guide you on this errand of death! Do with me as you will, yet will I not lead you."

Tho smiled, and motioned with his hand. Four men stepped from the crowd and seized Ku-ro, flinging him roughly on his back. Another strode to the fire which blazed at Tho's feet, and lifted a brand.

"Touch him lightly, sparing eyes and feet," said Tho. "Let us see if this stubborn youth will not yield at the caress of the Red Flower."

Ku-ro struggled and plunged, but his captors held him close; wildly he looked about, seeing no sign of mercy on the grim, relentless faces that ringed him in—rather, a look of pleased anticipation, as at some joyous spectacle—on the face of Tho himself a half sneer. Nearer drew the torturer, bending over the victim; full on Ku-ro's naked shoulder he pressed the brand, and smoke and steam and the reek of burning flesh rose into the frosty air.

Ku-ro clenched his teeth and bore the agony as best he might—slowly the warrior drew the glowing stick across the skin to a fresh spot—these men knew how to torture! At length a cry broke from the youth, torn from his lips despite his resolution, and he twisted and writhed, screaming:

"Mercy, great chieftain, mercy! Have pity! I will guide you!"

Tho motioned, and the brand was lifted; melted grease was poured over the burns, and Ku-ro was half led, half carried away, Tho saying:

"Guard him well lest he escape; it was not in my mind that he could bear the fire's kiss!"

Now, Ku-ro was far from being a cow-

ard; indeed, for an artist he was possessed of uncommon fortitude and courage, and Tho's men might well have slain him little by little without result had not a sudden thought come to him. It seemed as though a voice spoke in his ear, warning him that it was for this the Great Father had saved him; that he must pretend to guide the Sur, yet watch a chance to slip away, elude them, and warn the Ta-an, that Nan-a-ta and his men might lay an ambush and cut off the invaders utterly.

So he yielded, and after a night's rest, his burned shoulder still paining, yet the burns healing from the rude surgery, Ku-ro, the Carver of Ivory, set off to lead the men of the Sur.

Traveling was easier than when he had been alone, for the men of the Sur were well provided with food, cooking utensils, and firewood, and though there was neither mercy nor ruth among them—savage and fierce as the Little Hairy Men they were, though far more advanced in the arts of civilization—yet they treated their captive well, knowing his value.

Ku-ro made use of his opportunities to learn the number of the warriors—some twenty tens there were—and to see all that he might of their weapons and mode of warfare. And some things of interest rewarded his curiosity.

The Sur knew not the bow and arrow; this Ku-ro learned early. Instead, they used a curious cup-shaped bit of bone lashed to a long and flexible stick; a dart was laid along the stick, its butt in the cup, and was hurled with an overhand sweep of the arm.

This was the throwing-stick, once used by the Ta-an, but discarded and cast aside when T'san-va-men, Lord of the Winged Death, invented the bow and arrow from which he took his warrior-name.

Ku-ro begged his guard to speed a dart from the throwing-stick, and Kas, proud of the weapon, confident of the superiority of all that belonged to the Sur, welcomed the chance to impress the captive, whom he deemed of a lower race.

Ku-ro at once saw that the bow and arrow was the better weapon, but craftily hid his knowledge, and pretended to be aston-

ished at the range of Kas's dart, whereat the latter swelled with gratified conceit, and assured Ku-ro that the Sur were wiser and stronger and better than all other peoples.

Another thing Ku-ro saw which astonished him mightily, something which he stored in his mind as offering a value to the Ta-an. That was the use of cattle as beasts of burdens, a thing unknown to the People of the Mountain Caves, who merely hunted them for food.

But the Sur had with them a score or more of oxen, who carried food and firewood, being led by a thong through the nose. As each of the beasts was freed from his load—as the burden was consumed—the beast was killed, thus furnishing more food. Ku-ro quickly saw the advantage of this, and by flattering his guard learned much of the way of taming and training the cattle, resolving that if he was spared he would pass on this knowledge to his own people.

So the days drew on, Ku-ro ever striving to ingratiate himself that the watch on his movements might be relaxed, and ever on the lookout for a chance to escape. And all the time he led the Sur astray whenever possible; instead of conducting them directly westward toward the Valley of the Ta-an, he led them northward, saying—for after a time Tho felt vague stirrings of suspicion—that the mountains toward the setting sun were impassable, and that it was necessary to skirt around them.

So through the mighty tangle of peaks Ku-ro took his captors, through passes well-nigh blocked by drifted snow, across the face of vast glaciers, over bare and windswept rocks, where all the Devils of the Air whistled and roared and howled about their ears.

And never a living thing save their own party was seen in all that terrible journey; no beast or bird prowled or swooped, no tree or bush or moss darkened the white expanse of that rightful waste, no sound smote their ears save the rush and sweep of the wind and the occasional rumble and thunder of the avalanche; all was desolation and desert, peril, and the ever-present fear of death.

At length came an evening when the party



camped on the edge of a crevasse almost as wide as that into which Tu-sen had disappeared. A narrow bridge of snow, barely wide enough for one man, too narrow for two abreast, spanned the black depths, and Tho, inspecting this, gave orders to wait for daylight—for the dusk was closing in—before attempting the passage.

To right and left, far as the eye could see, stretched the frightful gash in the icy surface, nor could he even guess how many days' journey it would be to skirt the chasm. Therefore, though he mistrusted the strength of the bridge, Tho resolved to dare the passage as soon as the light returned.

Aware of the chieftain's decision, Ku-ro decided that this night he would attempt to escape. The bridge would serve him to cross, could easily be broken down after his passing, and the crevasse would hold back the invaders for a time at least.

For some time past Ku-ro had been making preparations for flight; he had managed to steal and secrete a stout flint dagger, less finely finished than those of the Ta-an, yet serviceable enough; he had hidden in the pack he was forced to carry scraps of food, dried meat, and bits of roots saved from his meals; he had carefully noted the lay of the hills, that he might preserve his sense of direction; and he had tried whenever possible to undermine the loyalty of Kas, his guard, by hint, by innuendo, and by tales of the prowess of the Ta-an.

So, thinking it over, Ku-ro concluded that here was the chance he sought, and though his heart turned sick within him at the bare idea of crossing that frightful depth in the dark, yet he gathered together his courage, and forced himself to the desperate resolve.

Supper was prepared, and Ku-ro choked down food, knowing that he would need all his strength for the attempt, then rolled himself in skins and lay down, his head resting on his pack, his right hand clenched for comfort on the handle of his dagger. But he did not sleep; pretending slumber, he nevertheless lay wide awake, waiting that midnight hour when sleep is soundest, not-

ing ever the slow and reluctant passage of the stars across the sky.

He was not bound; he had so ingratiated himself with Kas that the latter thought bonds unnecessary, though he slept always with his arm thrown across the body of Ku-ro, that the slightest motion of the captive might wake him.

So when Ku-ro saw by the Belt of the Hunter\* that the middle hour was at hand he slowly, very slowly, and with infinite caution began to creep from under the arm of Kas.

Slowly, slowly, stopping long between movements, waiting when Kas stirred, he rolled away, taking care to move the arm as little as might be, lowering it gently and easily as he took his body from beneath.

From time to time Kas grunted or moved uneasily, and Ku-ro waited. At last the task was nearly accomplished, and the hand well-nigh rested on the skins, when Kas, twitching in his sleep, dragged his hand from Ku-ro's, and it fell with a thump. Instantly Kas opened his eyes and sat half-way up, asking:

"Who moves?"

"Sleep once more," whispered Ku-ro. "I but rolled to the other side."

Kas seemed satisfied, and lay down again, but some vague sense of uneasiness penetrated his mind, and he opened his eyes, blinking, to see Ku-ro kneeling beside him. Like a flash he was on his feet, seizing Ku-ro by the arm—his mouth opened to yell for help—Ku-ro's left hand closed on the warrior's throat, cutting off the yell unuttered—Ku-ro's dagger flashed—a dull sound—a rush of blood—and Kas sank lifeless to the ice.

Crouching, Ku-ro listened for some moments, but no one stirred; no sound came to him save the sighing of the night wind and the heavy snores of the sleepers, and cautiously he picked his way among the forms of the resting warriors toward the crevasse.

He stopped once to take a lance which lay by one of the men, and again to lift from the ice a slab of dried meat, then hurried onward to the bridge of snow by which he must cross, a hundred paces from where he had lain down.

\* Possibly the constellation which we know as Orion.

It was a moonless night, but the stars gave a faint illumination, and Ku-ro found the bridge easily. All about lay silent save for the breathing wind; empty the vast glacier, save for the sleeping camp behind; dark-gray the ice and snow, tinged with blue from the vault above; and heavy and black the shadows—blackest of all that fearful gash which lay before.

At the edge of the crevasse Ku-ro's courage broke; shuddering, sick, his head reeling, he sank down, the vivid memory of Tu-sen flashing before his eyes, Tu-sen's screams ringing in his ears. Faint and sick, he rested on the ice, hiding his face in his hands, moaning:

"I cannot! I cannot! Great Father, spare me!"

Then rose before him the memory of Then-ai, and again he heard the words:

"Need of you lies heavy on the tribesmen. Serve faithfully; so shall your reward be great!"

And Ku-ro gathered himself together. Rising to his feet he prayed:

"O-Ma-Ken, Great Father, grant me, I pray, strength to do Thy will!" And though his knees still shook, though his very soul shuddered, he strode forward to the task; he was in the hands of the Great Father—were it His will that the messenger win through, well and good. Otherwise—so much the sooner with the Lance of Dawn!

But as he stepped on the bridge Ku-ro realized that he could not cross upright; the snow-combs which met to form the passage rose in the center to form a crown—also, they were crowned transversely, so that a slip meant death; one could not recover.

Ku-ro slung the pack on his shoulders, thrust the dagger in his girdle, took the lance in his right hand, and dropped on his knees, crawling slowly out on the perilous journey.

The bridge was narrow; not the height of a man in width, and the space whereon one might creep was scarce four hands' breadths wide; at the sides the slope fell away sharply, so that a slip—and as this thought crossed his mind Ku-ro, now midway of the passage, glanced sidewise.

Instantly he fell prone on his face, clutching at the smooth snow, closing his eyes to shut out that frightful vision of depth, guessed, not seen! And as he lay there came once more the memory of Tu-sen. Tu-sen had trusted to a bridge far larger than this—and it had failed! And as this thought struck him Ku-ro felt the snow beneath him shudder, slip—and drop!

"Then-ai!" he gasped, and clenched his fists for the long, appalling, ghastly, downward rush, the awful shock—death! But the expected fall did not come; Ku-ro opened his eyes and saw that the bridge had but sagged a few feet and then had caught.

Instantly he scrambled to his hands and knees and, shaking from head to foot, gasping, panting like a hunted deer, lips and mouth parched with terror, a sickening terror far worse than the fear of death, he crept onward toward the firm ice two lances' lengths away.

Reaching the farther edge of the abyss, Ku-ro sank helpless, shuddering, on the ice, trembling in every fiber of his being; outraged nature took her revenge, and he was deathly sick, vomiting furiously, with choking noises that he feared might rouse the sleepers of the Sur, a hundred paces distant.

But at long last he grew quiet, and lay for a time resting; gradually his trembling became less and less, till presently he saw by the stars that he had lain there more than an hour—yes, more than two hours—and rousing himself, he set to work to break down the bridge whereby he had crossed.

This proved more of a task than he had expected; the snow, packed by repeated freezing and thawing, was almost as hard as ice, and though the bridge had slipped under his weight its fall had but jammed it between the sheer walls of ice.

Hour after hour Ku-ro labored, chipping furiously at the hard snow with his lance, working madly to finish the task ere dawn should betray him. Hour after hour, a chip at a time, he dug, the sweat running from him in streams despite the cold, so that he felt the salt taste of it in his mouth and blinked and shook it from his eyes.

Now the task was well-nigh done, and

Ku-ro rested for a moment to get his breath. Glancing upward he saw that the stars were paling, and in the east a faint gray light broke the deep blue of the heavens—dawn was at hand.

Furiously he turned once more to his task, and even as he did he heard a shout from the camp of the Sur—some one, early afoot, had found the body of Kas, stark and stiff, lying in a pool of frozen blood. Shouts resounded, calls of men, torches blazed and bobbed back and forth, and soon Ku-ro saw in the growing light of morning that the warriors of the Sur were running toward the spot where he stood.

Despairing, he dug frantically at the bridge, hoping that he had at least weakened it so that it would fall under the foremost man. Cries of rage sounded from the farther brink, darts whistled about his ears, there came a rush of scurrying feet—the warriors were at the bridge!

Mad with grief and despair, Ku-ro planted himself at the end, lance in hand, to sell his life as dearly as might be, and saw that but one man rushed toward him. Tho, fearing the weakened span, held back the others. Ku-ro gave one last thrust at the bridge—it gave—creaked—shuddered downward—halted—gave—and with ever-increasing noise the span parted—and the mass fell roaring and thundering into the depths.

The one warrior who had ventured was near the edge. With panther-spring he flung himself forward—caught the lip of the crevasse—and even as Ku-ro thrust at him he dodged and drew himself up to safe footing, rushing on Ku-ro, ax swung high.

From the farther brink came howls of fury, and Ku-ro, from the corner of his eye, caught sight of a line of men dancing with rage on the edge; darts flew about him, one grazing his shoulder, but soon they stopped, for the Sur feared to wound their own man, who now closed with Ku-ro.

Ku-ro knew him for one of the deadliest fighters of the Sur, Sa-thur by name, not a big man, but active and courageous beyond belief, and his heart sank at the coming battle.

He thrust at Sa-thur with his lance, but the other dodged, swung, and the keen ax

shore through the oaken staff, leaving Ku-ro weaponless save for his dagger. A howl of delight rose from the men of the Sur as they saw the lance-head fly, spinning, across the ice, and Sa-thur grinned as he sprang on his defenseless enemy.

Ku-ro's heart sank, but as Sa-thur rushed on him he stooped, caught up a handful of snow, and dashed it in the other's eyes. It was enough—Sa-thur halted an instant—Ku-ro leaped—his dagger gleamed in the morning light—flashed downward—and from the warriors of the Sur there rose and swelled a long-drawn howl of rage—furious curses—as their champion rolled lifeless at Ku-ro's feet!

Zigzagging, leaping from side to side, Ku-ro dashed for the shelter of a mound of snow some fifty paces away, and reached it safely despite the shower of darts which rattled on the ice about him as he ran.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE WINGS OF THE SNOW.

**A**FTER some four or five days of merciless, unsparing travel Ku-ro found himself drawing out from the high hills and working downward to the valleys. Many ranges of low and rolling hills yet lay between him and the Valley of the Taran, but he had kept his sense of direction and hoped that he might outspeed the warriors of the Sur.

One thing troubled him; in the valleys and on the low ground over which he must travel the snow lay far thicker than among the peaks. There the wind had swept it into huge drifts which could often be gone around or which had been hardened and impacted till it would bear the weight of a man, but here it lay soft and deep, often waist-high, seldom less than up to a man's knees, even where the breezes of the sheltered valleys had somewhat blown it aside.

Therefore the going was slow; Ku-ro must plow laboriously through, and he feared that the Sur, skirting the crevasse, might overtake him, since they could take turns in breaking trail where he must plunge through alone.

One comfort, though, there was—game

was plentiful, and in the deep snow easy to track and slay, so that he felt no lack of food, and despite his arduous labors grew stronger day by day. To be sure, there were also beasts of prey which must be guarded against, but Ku-ro was well enough trained in woodcraft to care for himself in the forests and on the plains.

So day after day, he struggled on, making all possible haste lest the Sur, falling upon his trail, overtake him ere he could reach the Valley of the Ta-an and lay his message before the great chieftain. Leaving the high hills, he had left behind the evergreens which grew on their lower slopes, and now found himself journeying through woods of oak and maple, birch and beech, with here and there the somber form of a cedar to give a change in the white and blue and gray of snow and forest—a cedar or a fir, strayed by chance from the higher levels into these fruitful and pleasant lowlands.

One day, toward evening, just as Ku-ro was beginning to think about food, he caught sight of a round hole in the snow some paces ahead, and grinned to himself, for he recognized it at once—a partridge lay below. It was a trick of the bird, he knew, when hotly pursued by hawk or eagle, to dive into the snow on a long slant, folding its wings as it shot downward, lying hidden at the end of the gallery thus made till the danger had passed.

He looked about, but could see no place where the partridge had broken out, so stepped forward cautiously, locating the direction of the dive, and following on, slowly and carefully, every sense alert, every muscle poised.

It was a trick he had often practised, this of catching a snow-hidden bird, and one which few among the Ta-an could accomplish, skilled hunters though they were.

He had made but three or four steps when the startled bird broke cover with a loud whir, scattering the snow broadcast. Instantly, with a panther-spring, Ku-ro dove forward full length in the snow, hands outstretched and clutching, to rise a moment later with the bird held fast—he had caught it in mid air!

But as he got to his feet a treacherous

stone beneath him turned, he lost his balance—flung out his arms—and rolled over and over, not, however, releasing his prey. Striving to rise, a frightful pain shot through his leg, and he realized that he had once more turned the ankle which had been injured the day Tu-sen died.

Cursing, Ku-ro killed the partridge, then set about to repair the damage as best he might. Moving on hands and knees, he cleared a space in the snow at the foot of a huge oak, then gathered firewood and built a fire. A little brook ran near by, and from the bank he got several good-sized stones, placing them on the fire to heat while he stripped a sheet of bark from a birch-tree.

This bark he fashioned into a sort of rude trough, pinning the ends with twigs, then filled it with water and dropped hot stones in—handling them with two sticks—till the water was hot. Into this hot water he plunged his foot and ankle, from time to time adding more stones from the fire, and occupying himself while the ankle soaked in plucking and gutting the partridge, spitting it on a stick, and cooking it before the fire. The bird eaten, he withdrew the foot from the hot water and rubbed it dry, at length rolling in skins and lying down by the fire to sleep.

But as he was dozing off a thought struck him. It was the snow that held him back, impeding his journey—and he had more than once seen partridges walk *on top of the snow*. Could he but do likewise, how much more quickly he could reach the Valley of the Ta-an! Would it be possible for a man? Wings would not be needed—it might be!

Long he lay awake, staring up through the bare branches at the yellow stars that twinkled in the blue sky, trying to recollect what made it possible for the bird to do what he could not. Was a partridge web-footed, like a frog? No, he remembered distinctly the separate toes of the bird. What then?

And at length the question so bothered him that he rose, took a blazing branch from the fire, and went to search for the feet of the partridge which he had cut off and thrown away. Finding them, the mat-

ter was solved; a thick growth of feathers spreading out from the toes was evidently meant to support the bird, and Ku-ro threw the feet away in disgust—a man could not grow feathers on his toes! Rolling himself once more in his skins, he slept.

But with the coming of morning the problem recurred, insistent, clamoring for attention. All the while that Ku-ro was hunting down and cooking and eating a hare it hammered at his brain, demanding to be solved—there *must* be some way a man could walk on the snow!

Fed, Ku-ro went to a bush and cut from it a bundle of small branches, tying them to his feet with thongs of hide in imitation of the feathers of the partridge, then endeavored to walk by their aid.

The attempt was a failure; the twigs bent, tangled, got underfoot and tripped him, till at length he gave up, stripped them off in disgust, and resumed his laborious wallowing through the powdery white blanket. Throughout the day he traveled mechanically, guiding his steps by the sun without conscious effort, his mind busy with the obsessing problem—there *must* be a way! When night came he built a fire under another great tree, cooked the remains of the hare, and resolutely put the problem from his mind that he might sleep.

Toward morning he woke to a rustling sound, and lay silent, motionless, eyes wide, till he had identified the noise, then sat up suddenly and threw more fuel on his fire, causing it to blaze high. By the leaping blaze he saw ringing about him some two-score pairs of green and shining sparks gleaming through the underbrush, and his heart sank, for he knew that a pack of hunting wolves had fallen upon his trail and would follow till they pulled him down.

He shuddered, for his imagination pictured the quick rush, the leap, the swift hamstringing slash of knife-keen teeth, the snarling fight over his body—only a miracle could throw them off his track, and sooner or later, his vigilance relaxed, his eyelids heavy, they would pull him down.

But he resolved to live as long as might be; to sleep in trees by night and travel by day with a blazing brand ever in his grip, to ward off the danger while he might

—to struggle on as long as life remained. And to that end he built up his fire high, stripping twigs from the low-flung branches of the tree, then set his back to the trunk, and prepared for a long vigil.

Through the rest of the night Ku-ro alternately dozed and waked to pile brush on the fire. Outside the little circle of light the forest shadows lurked black and impenetrable, thick and heavy; on the nearby tree-trunks the ruddy light shone warm and rich, gleaming brightly from the snow; in and out among the brush sparkled and shifted and winked those menacing sparks, those deadly eyes, merciless.

The only sounds were the crackle of the fire, the sighing of the wind in the bare boughs overhead, and from time to time the faint rustle of a wolf, brushing against the twigs as he moved.

At length, just as the gray light of dawn filtered through the forest to pale the fire-light and lay strong yellow shafts on the white snow there rang through all the woodland aisles a wild wolf-howl, and Ku-ro was conscious that the beasts which watched him had withdrawn. Presently there rose not far away a terrific uproar, mingled snarling, howling, crash of bushes, and over all a thunderous trumpeting which told in no uncertain manner what had occurred.

A mammoth, leaving for some reason the tundras which were its range, had wandered into the forest, and the Gray Slayers had left the scent of man for this easier quarry. Ku-ro knew that his safety was well-nigh certain; whichever proved victor, he at least would be no more troubled by this pack, and wisdom told him to be on his way. But curiosity was stronger—he had never seen such a fight, though an old hunter of the tribe had told him of one that he had witnessed—and Ku-ro turned toward the sounds.

A hundred paces through the forest, and he came to the edge of a little glade some twenty paces across and halted on the margin, hiding behind a tree to watch. Fair in the center of the open space stood a huge bull mammoth, facing toward the young man, his long hair flecked with blood. Twice the height of a tall man at the shoulder he stood, feet braced and head thrown

back, while round him rushed and whirled and spun full twoscore wolves, leaping in, dashing out, their jaws snapping, their sharp teeth slashing in frantic effort to cut through the vast beast's tough skin and bring him down.

As Ku-ro watched the mammoth stooped with lightning motion—incredible in so huge a beast!—and a wolf, reckless, trusting his lightness of foot, was impaled on one of the long and pointed tusks; through and through the sharp tusk pierced, and the Gray Slayer, howling and writhing horribly, was whirled aloft; a toss of that giant head, and the wolf was hurled twenty paces away, smashing against a tree and falling dead.

A sweep of the great trunk, and another wolf was sent to join the first—less fortunate, this one died not instantly, but with jaws to the sky, howling in agony, dragged himself frantically about in circles, his spine broken, his hind legs useless.

But still the ravening beasts circled about the trumpeting mammoth, darting in, slashing, springing out once more. Again and again the great trunk swept as the mammoth whirled to meet his tormentors and with each sweep a wolf died, some instantly, smashed and broken, others more slowly. One, venturing too near, was caught beneath a forefoot and squirmed, clawing and biting, as his life was crushed slowly out by that ponderous weight; the mammoth paid no heed, but pinned him down till his struggles ended.

The snow was littered with dark gray bodies, some still, others writhing and twisting in agony; red spots marked its white surface, and where Do-m'rai stood it was trampled to a horrible red slush, for the mammoth bled from a thousand wounds. The leader of the pack, a great brute standing higher than a man's waist, leaped, slashing, at the mammoth's trunk, uplifted high; his forepaws caught and for an instant clung on a tusk as his bloody jaws snapped vainly upward, and in that instant the trunk lashed down and curled about his neck.

Up, up it swung—swooped down—and like a stone from a sling the wolf spun whirling through the air, to strike with a ghastly crunching sound against the very tree where Ku-ro was hid; limp, shattered,

life utterly smashed out, he fell at the young man's feet, and Ku-ro wiped from his face the blood that had splashed from the body.

And now the attack grew weaker; more and more bodies lay motionless on the snow of the little glade; fainter and fainter rose the howls and snarls, till but one of the wolves was left. Do-m'rai, weak from loss of blood, swayed on his feet as this last enemy circled about seeking an opening, yet ever he fronted the flying beast. About, around, in and out, sprang Menzono, yet ever those deadly tusks, that fatal trunk confronted him.

At last, mad with lust of blood, frenzied with excitement, he leaped—and died in mid air! The great head dipped, the tusks thrust forward, and the last of the wolves, caught fairly in the belly, impaled himself by the force of his own spring. The mammoth shook him off, looked about, saw no more foes, trumpeted his triumph, and started away.

Half-way to the edge of the forest he staggered, swayed, stood a moment with feet braced wide apart and swinging head, trumpeted again, this time more faintly, and slowly, slowly, like some great tree falling, dropped to his knees, tried vainly to rise, struggled a moment, and then rolled over on his side and lay still.

Ku-ro watched for a time, then cast a glance about the little glade littered with dead and dying, slayers and slain, noted the trampled snow, blotched red, and turned away, heaving a deep breath—never had he dreamed of such a fight!

As Ku-ro resumed his journey his mind was full of the fight he had just seen; the thronging pictures for a time forced all other thoughts away, but presently he came back once more to the problem that had offered; recurring, insistent, this question forced itself upon him—how to walk on the snow?

The twigs had failed him; too flexible, their ends swept about and hindered his walk—could he but fasten the ends! Then, like a flash, the answer came; he would make two hoops, like those used for shields, and bind the ends of the branches to them—no, that would take too long—why not two shields, covered with hide?

At once he turned back to the glade where Do-m'rai had fought Menzono, and, working swiftly as possible, stripped the skins from two of the wolves, fleshing them carefully, but leaving the hair on—time lacked to tan them properly. He cut branches from a tree, and made two hoops, using two branches to each—sapless, the boughs would not bend in a full circle without breaking.

These he lashed together to make the hoops, bracing them apart in the middle so that they bellied out like shields, and over them he stretched the hides, turning the edges up, cutting them to shape, and stitching them with thongs run through holes which he pierced with his dagger. Lashings were made of thongs, and he bound the strange footgear to his feet and ankles.

Getting to his feet, he tried to walk, but the cumbrous things, though they bore him up, yet hampered and tripped him, being tied rigidly to his feet. For a long time he thought, then, stooping, cut free his heels so that only the toes were bound.

And now, by walking with a sliding motion, he could progress with fair speed, despite the piling up of the snow on the web of the shoes, making them heavy and hard to lift. Delighted, glowing with satisfaction, Ku-ro marched along, striving ever for greater ease in the use of the new footgear, stopping from time to time to free the shoes from the piled-up snow.

And when night came he camped far beyond where he would have been with the old way of travel—indeed, so pleased was he that he marched much later than usual, stopping only when the gathering dark made it impossible to take another step. And a happy man it was who rolled himself in skins before the fire that night!

Next morning Ku-ro was afoot with the first gleam of dawn, and cooked and ate his food in haste, so eager was he to try the new shoes, though even yet he did not realize their full value—to him they were but a means whereby he might journey in haste. And famously they served him, for he traveled well-nigh ten times as far as he could have done in plowing through the snow.

But about noon sharp pains began to shoot up the backs of his legs, pains as

though one were driving red-hot knives into the flesh, and barely could the young man move one foot after the other. It was the terrible *mal de racquette*, the sickness of the snowshoe, and by mid-afternoon Ku-ro was forced to give over and rest.

At bottom no more than the protest of unaccustomed muscles, it grows till each step becomes a separate, age-long torture, and when most severe puts an end to travel. But Ku-ro persisted, grinding his teeth, cursing, tossing his head, till the frightful cramps overcame even his stout heart.

At length he managed to build a fire and seated himself beside it, rubbing and kneading the knotted muscles, slowly working from them the hard lumps which proclaimed the fearful cramps. Presently the pain eased somewhat, and he cooked and ate some food, finally falling into a restless and broken slumber, moaning in his sleep, waking at times to renew the fire.

When he woke fully at dawn the pain was almost gone, and he bound the snowshoes once more to his feet and struggled grimly on, gritting his teeth against the pain. But this, though calling for no little fortitude, was, after all, the best possible treatment, and by noon the pain was better—there remained only a stiffness, a trifling lameness, which by the following morning had entirely disappeared, and Ku-ro was a hardened snowshoe walker.

So for day after day he journeyed, till at last there rose on the far horizon a range of hills whose outline seemed familiar. Gradually they rose, till finally he recognized them, shouting aloud for joy as recollection came. That night he camped almost at the foot of the range—circling wide, he had come in from the north—and by the middle of the following morning he stood on the crest, gazing down into the Valley of the Ta-an.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE BATTLE.

**F**RANTIC with joy at the sight of the home from which he had so long been gone, the home he had not hoped to see again, Ku-ro stood and gazed into the



peaceful valley, searching for signs of war—had the Sur reached there before him?

But all was quiet; the smoke rose in columns from the fire-hearths, and groups of men and women stood about talking as he had often seen them do. Still—it might be—there was but one thing to do—descend and learn. And if the Sur had taken the valley—well, he, too, could die fighting! And there rose in his mind the memory of the Lance of Dawn, and sorrow gripped his heart as he realized that she would not be there to welcome him.

Gathering himself together, Ku-ro started on the long descent, following the trail which angled down the mountain, packed by the feet of hunters. He had gone but a few steps when his feet slipped, and he crouched to regain his balance. Instantly—or so it seemed—the snowshoes took command. Ku-ro seized the toes, the forward ends of the hoops, and held on while the shoes, like a toboggan, carried him at ever increasing speed down the slope.

Squatting, he kept his balance, and faster and faster he flew, snow rising in a cloud behind him like dust behind a fleeing band of the wild horse. Faster and faster, rock and tree rushing by at lightning speed, till Ku-ro was terrified—yet he could not stop.

Rounding a gentle curve, he saw before him a group of hunters—he shouted loud—they sprang from the trail, and one raised his bow at sight of this strange animal bearing down on them—another, quicker of wit, struck the bow aside so that the arrow flew harmless—Ku-ro had one flashing glimpse of Ban, close friend to the great chieftain—and they were behind him.

On and on he sped, till at last he shot over the edge of the bank, rushed through the air, and dropped some thirty feet to the bosom of the frozen river.

By the greatest of good fortune he plunged into a deep drift, so that though dizzy and shaken he took no serious harm, but extricated himself and faced toward the shore, making the peace sign with uplifted hand as a band of warriors, full-armed, arrow on string, bore down on this strange invader. As the fighting men drew near the leader halted some ten paces from the young man, stared an instant, shouted:

"Ku-ro! Carver of Ivory!" And in a second the two were in each other's arms—it was Po-tan, one of Ku-ro's closest friends, who had long mourned the Carver of Ivory as dead. Greetings followed, question and inquiry from the delighted men, pushing and jostling, but to all Ku-ro replied:

"First to the great chieftain! News of import to the Ta-an!" and pushed his way to the cave of Nan-a-ta. The tribesmen followed, nudging one another and whispering:

"He walks on the snow! This is magic!" But Ku-ro paid no heed; pressing on to the cave of the great chieftain, and bowing before Nan-a-ta, he traced on the floor the three interlocking circles which indicated his desire to speak.

"Say on!" responded Nan-a-ta to this silent request, and Ku-ro answered:

"Great chieftain, from the Eastern Hills come the Sur, to slay the People of the Mountain Caves and take their homes."

"How is this known to you?" was the incisive question, and Ku-ro related his adventures, telling of the death of Tu-sen, his own capture and escape, and of his inventing the snowshoe to hasten his journey. To all Nan-a-ta listened gravely, examining with care the snowshoes, and at the end he spoke:

"It is well done, Carver of Ivory. Much honor shall be thine."

"Nay, great chieftain," responded Ku-ro, "Then-ai being dead, naught is honor to me! Let me, I pray, find death in the battle that comes, that I may the sooner go to seek her I love!"

A faint smile flickered on the chieftain's lips, but he made no reply. Turning to Su, his lieutenant, who stood beside him, he said:

"On all the trails let a watch be set, lest the Sur come upon us unawares. Let the artisans examine well these wings of the snow whereon Ku-ro walks, making many of them, that in the battle with the Sur—do they come ere the snow be gone—the advantage may lie with the Ta-an."

Ku-ro gasped—he had never thought of the snowshoes for this; to him they were but a means of travel! But he recognized at once the insight of Nan-a-ta, and bowed

in respect for his wisdom. Su acknowledged the order, and departed; along the path by the river Ku-ro heard the voices of the tribesmen exclaiming, shouting, exulting, as the news flew from lip to lip—Ku-ro had returned with a new weapon—there was to be a battle! And the warriors hastened to spread the word throughout the valley and to prepare ax and lance and bow for the fight. But within the cave of Nan-a-ta was silence till the shoutings died away, then the great chieftain spoke:

"Life is naught to you, nor honor?"

"Nay, great chieftain, for the Ta-an was it done; for myself I crave but to seek Then-ai!"

"Should I give you death this day you would thank me?"

"In very truth, great chieftain!"

"It is well! Great has been your service; great also shall be your reward—this very day shalt thou meet the Lance of Dawn. Kneel!"

Ku-ro knelt.

"Close your eyes and bend your neck for the stroke."

And Ku-ro obeyed. Nan-a-ta whistled, and Ku-ro heard the pad of skin-shod feet approaching; then Nan-a-ta spoke again.

"This man craves death," said the chieftain to the newcomer. "Take then this ax and set him free!"

Head bent, eyes closed, Ku-ro waited the stroke, but it fell not. For some moments he waited, then raised his head and glanced about to see wherefore the delay. Amazed he stared, his jaw dropping—before him, smiling, stood the Lance of Dawn! Half frightened, Ku-ro raised his arm, thinking it another vision, but Nan-a-ta spoke:

"Nay, Carver of Ivory," said he, "no dream is this! The arrow of Tu-sen pierced not deep, and Then-ai lives. Is this your greeting, that you lay your arm before your eyes to shut out the sight?"

With a shout Ku-ro sprang to his feet, and the lovers flung themselves into each other's arms, Nan-a-ta watching, a smile on his stern, scarred face. Presently he spoke again, quizzically, saying:

"But the Carver of Ivory craves death. Kneel then, Ku-ro, and I myself will be-

stow the boon you so desire, since the Lance of Dawn cares not to set you free!"

Ku-ro turned, his arms about the girl, hers clasped around his neck.

"Nay, great chieftain," he cried, "let me live forever!" And Nan-a-ta laughed aloud.

There followed days of intense activity among the People of the Mountain Caves. Men cut and bent and fastened branches of oak for the framework of many pairs of the Wings of the Snow, steaming the dry wood over pots of boiling water till it softened and bent freely; others hunted and slew and skinned beasts, that the hides might furnish the webs; and still others stretched and fastened the hides in place, the women taking part in this last task.

Ku-ro taught the fighting men how to manage the new footgear, and from dawn to dark, as each was supplied, he practised duly to learn, to overcome the first pain of this new mode of travel. Some were more apt than others, but in the end all were furnished with snowshoes, and all could progress more rapidly than in plowing through the deep snow which lay from end to end of the Valley of the Ta-an.

And none too soon, indeed, was the task accomplished, for less than a week after the last of the tribesmen had received his snowshoes there came messengers crying:

"Great chieftain, the Sur draw near!"

Nan-a-ta had long since planned his battle; the Sur were to be utterly cut off, none escaping, and word had been passed among the tribesmen so that each knew where lay his task. And now a half-dozen of scouts were sent to the crest of the mountain—among them Ku-ro—to report on the strength and actions of the invaders.

True, the great chieftain had Ku-ro's word that the Sur brought some two hundred fighting men, but much might have chanced since his escape—others might have joined them, or some might have been lost.

So the Carver of Ivory climbed the long trail down which he had slid some three weeks before, and looking out across the country which lay to the north, he saw the Sur approaching, strung out in a long line.

They did not come precisely along the track he had followed, but angled in some-

what, and Ku-ro was puzzled to see them stop, bunch up in a group, and hesitate when they reached the foot of the mountain. Suddenly the explanation struck him, and he laughed aloud—coming upon the marks of his snowshoes the Sur had taken them for the tracks of some strange and unknown beast.

And what a beast! Again Ku-ro laughed, for the footprints were half the length of a man's body, and two-thirds that in width. He pictured to himself the amazement, the dread that must be theirs at these gigantic tracks, vast beyond those of the mammoth itself, and respect for the warriors of the Sur welled up within him, for now they were coming on, facing bravely that unknown, terrible thing. Turning, he made his way down the mountain with the other scouts, to report to the great chieftain.

At the foot of the trail down the mountain the hills drew somewhat back from the river, leaving an open space, a flat meadow, covered in summer with lush green grass, now deep with snow. On this meadow, years before, had been fought the battle which made Nan-a-ta great chieftain of the Ta-an, and now it was to be the scene of a fight more desperate than that, a fight not for the leadership of the tribe, but for the very life of the Ta-an, for their existence as a people.

Ringed about by thick woods save on the riverside, thigh-deep in snow, it made a trap that Nan-a-ta would use to the full, a trap whence no enemy should escape.

Down the narrow trail marched the Sur in single file, weapons ready, for they knew they had reached their goal—the signs were not to be mistaken. But no opposing warrior stood before them; no javelin or dart struck among them; no boulders plunged downward among their ranks, and their exultation grew—they would take the Ta-an unawares!

On and on they came, marching steadily, till they had reached the open space, and closed in about their chief, looking around, waiting his signal to begin the hunt.

Suddenly from the forest rang the deep voice of Nan-a-ta:

"Shoot swiftly, Men of the Ta-an!"

Instant with the word there sped a flight of arrows, singing, blasting death—buzzing like hornets they flew, stinging more deeply. Another followed—another—while the Sur, dismayed, surprised, stared helpless or reeled and plunged, death-stricken.

But Tho, the chieftain, recovered quickly and with the bellow of a bull led his men in fierce attack straight on the hidden bowmen, even as a wild boar rushes on the wolves that bait him. Again the singing death smote them, and in dozens they fell—yet still the living plunged onward through the snow toward the forest.

But this attack was their undoing; floundering in the deep snow, they were no match for the men of the Ta-an who, agile, shod with the new footgear, fighting downward from the height of the snow, met the enemy with ax and lance and dagger.

The battle broke into scores of single combats, and the forest resounded with shouts and cries, with call of triumph or shriek and groan of agony as the sharp flint bit home. Bodies lay scattered about, bodies of Sur or of Ta-an; men rolled and plunged in death-grip, striking and stabbing, biting, kicking, gouging, while the loose and powdery snow rose in smothering clouds about them, the sharp crystals stinging in throat and nostril.

Blotched with red lay the white snow, or trampled to a slush, red, horrible; and desperate man slew desperate man in bitter conflict, while into the thin and frosty air rose a white steam from nostril or from gaping wound.

No mercy was asked or given—the Sur knew the trap into which they had been led, they knew their lives forfeit, and they died as dies Menzono, the Gray Slayer, the great wolf of the forest—biting hard, they died.

The chance of battle brought Ku-ro face to face with Tho, chieftain of the Sur, and into the latter's eyes there sprang a gleam of recognition. By now he knew the secret of the Wings of the Snow, he knew the fate to which his own blind self-confidence had brought him, and with a shout of joy he sprang on the one who had given the timely warning.

Ku-ro thrust sharply with his lance—

Tho's great arm swept aside the stroke—the spear was jerked from Ku-ro's hand—and the chieftain of the Sur leaped forward, grinning, his huge stone war-club swung aloft for a mighty stroke.

Ku-ro sprang back—the blow missed—the club, striking against the frozen ground, was shattered, and the fragments lost in the snow. Ku-ro's own ax had been lost some time before, and his dagger broken—weaponless, he struck at Tho, who minded the blow not at all, but rushed on—and those mighty hands closed on the young man's throat.

Overborne, Ku-ro fell backward, the chieftain of the Sur on top—together they rolled over and over down the bank to the frozen stream, Ku-ro striking uselessly at the giant who seemed insensible to his puny fists.

Over and over they rolled—there came a splash—a numbing shock—and Ku-ro knew they had fallen into the river where the ice had been cut for fishing.

And now the battle turned; Tho, unused to swimming, had all the fear of the water that lives ever with those who know it not—further, the icy plunge had for an instant halted his vital forces, and in that instant Ku-ro wrenched free.

The Carver of Ivory was one of the strongest swimmers of the Ta-an—at home in the water, it was now he who attacked—Tho, panic-stricken, smitten with utter terror, strove to grip him, to save himself—Ku-ro thrust him ever farther down, eluded his frantic clawings—under the ice they were carried, and Ku-ro knew that he must win back soon.

Fighting, bubbling, gurgling, their heads striking against the crystal roof, they were swept down—rolling over and over beneath the water they fought—vaguely Ku-ro could make out the whirling form of Tho, half seen in the dim, green light—his lungs would burst—with a kick he freed himself, and struck out for the opening, faintly light in the dusk.

Gasping, panting, shivering from the icy stream, Ku-ro hauled himself to the surface—out—and stretched full length on the snow, looking with joy at the clear blue sky that arched high overhead. The body

of Tho, Great Chieftain of the Sur, was swept on downward to the sea.

The Ta-an had suffered in the battle, but they were content, for the Sur had been utterly wiped out, annihilated, not one remaining to carry back to the Eastern Hills the news of the disaster, and great was the rejoicing among the People of the Mountain Caves. The great chieftain sent word that on the third day after the fight the tribesmen were to meet at the Great Rock of Council, and this was duly done, all pressing to hear the words of Nan-a-ta.

Men with branches had swept the snow from the surface of the rock, and there the chieftain took his stand—with him Sen-ko, the chief priest; Ku-ro, and Then-ai.

Ku-ro glanced about him with interest, recalling the day, gray and overcast even as this one, when he had stood in that same place, the people clustering below then as now.

How much had passed since then! And as he looked the former scene rose clear in his mind so that involuntarily he turned to search for Tu-sen—then smiled faintly as he remembered; Tu-sen lay far at the bottom of the Great River of Ice!

He turned to Then-ai, and her smile as she pressed her hand to her bosom where the arrow had struck showed that her thoughts were even as his own. But now the great chieftain was speaking, and all were silent to hear his words.

"People of the Mountain Caves, to you is it known that Ku-ro the Carver of Ivory, seeking to avenge the traitorous blow of Tu-sen, brought news of the Sur—brought also the Wings of the Snow. Then-ai, the Lance of Dawn, is his; but shall not other reward as well be given him who has saved his people?"

Then from the multitude rose a shout, swelling and echoing through the snow-laden forest, rolling back from the mountainside.

"In very truth! Much honor shall be his, great chieftain!"

"It is well!" said Nan-a-ta. This, then, is in my mind. It is our custom that when one has well saved the tribe he shall be named great chieftain, to serve when that the leader passes into the Long Dark.

Well shall the Wings of the Snow aid the tribesmen in years to come, in war and in the chase, when that the snow lies deep in forests or on the plain. Is it your will that Ku-ro take my place and lead you when I am gone to my fathers?"

"It is our will!" rose the shout. "Well is it spoken, great chieftain of the Ta-an! Honor to Ku-ro, Carver of Ivory!"

Nan-a-ta raised his hand, and the shouts died away.

"Thus, then, be it. Henceforth Ku-ro passes from among us; in his place remains T'san-va-sa, Lord of the Wings of the Snow. It is said!"

Long and loud swelled the roar, rising, falling, sweeping upward to the sky from the throats of the tribesmen:

"Long life and honor to T'san-va-sa, Lord of the Wings of the Snow! Long life and honor to his bride!"

Hand in hand the two stepped forward,

joy and pride flooding their bosoms, the eyes of both shining as the multitude cried their honor and their love. Hand in hand on the margin of the Great Rock of Council they stood, and as they took their places the sun once more, as on that day so long ago, peeped out through the veiling clouds, striking full on the two figures with a shaft of glowing color.

And seeing this, seeing before them those youthful forms, so supple and straight, so strong and fair to look upon, shining in the ruddy light of the late winter sun, the tribesmen recognized an omen, a mark of the favor of O-Ma-Ken, the Great Father, a prophecy of happiness and welfare for the tribe, and with one accord, even as months before, the People of the Mountain Caves knelt with upraised arms, bowing in reverence before T'san-va-sa, Lord of the Wings of the Snow, and Then-ai, the Lance of Dawn, his destined bride.

(The end.)

## EVENING RAIN

BY ARTHUR WALLACE PEACH

AS gentle as the voice of love  
 Low-speaking in the eve,  
 As tender as the word of love  
 To wistful hearts that grieve,

The murmuring evening rain I hear  
 Beyond my open door;  
 And in my heart its summoning  
 Brings memories of yore.

The drifting scent of fading rose  
 Within my garden walls  
 Upon the warm and whispering air  
 Like some sweet incense falls.

The light wind bears it to my room,  
 And like a charm it brings  
 The rapture of dear days ago,  
 The joy of vanished springs.

Oh, ministry of twilight hours,  
 No holier balm for pain,  
 No richer gift of peace you have  
 Than breath of evening rain!

# The Stray Man

By Charles Alden Seltzer.

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Square Deal Sanderson," "The Trail Horde," etc.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

**T**AYLOR NELSON, known everywhere on the range as Shorty, although he is a giant in stature, cannot forget that in battle with outlaws some months back, his pal, Larry Dillon, was slain treacherously from the rear by Brail Kelton, of Blondy Antrim's band. Having bided his time for vengeance he finally decided this had arrived, and on Governor Kane Lawler's horse, Red King, presented to him by the Governor whose service on the ranch he was leaving, Shorty set out to find Kelton and exact it. In the vicinity of Loma he came upon a girl, thrown from her horse and helpless through a sprained ankle, and was quite complimented because she chose him rather than Blandell, one of her father's men, to carry her back home. She offered him a job on the Circle Star, but Shorty declined it, feeling that to accept just then would not be keeping faith with Larry. So he went on to Loma, where he befriended a stranger out of luck, who in turn befriended him when Shorty had for a second time made an enemy of Blandell by rescuing from his hands a boy's dog that had bitten him after being wantonly teased by Blandell. Deciding that after all Larry would forgive him if he followed out his strong inclination to accept service on the Circle Star ranch, Shorty headed that way, but was winged in the arm by a bullet from the rear and fell to the ground, where he lay inert after a horseman had ridden up to look down on him and remark:

"I reckon that settles you!"

## CHAPTER X.

### THE MOVING BLOT.

**S**HORTY'S guest at breakfast had made a leisurely journey to the Circle Star. He came in sight of the buildings shortly after noon and rode to the rear porch of the ranch-house, where he dismounted.

A door opening upon the porch was ajar, and through it floated appetizing odors that made the man crinkle his nose appreciatively. He called once, and then waited patiently until he heard a step inside the house. Then he stepped back and doffed his hat, for he had overheard Shorty speaking of a girl he had talked with at the ranch-house, and he expected she would appear at the door.

However it was a man who answered his

summons—and the visitor restored his hat to his head.

"I reckon this is the Circle Star?" said Shorty's guest.

The other nodded. His jaws were working; he was wiping his hands on a handkerchief. It was evident that he had been eating when interrupted.

"Heard you was lookin' for a cow-hand," went on the visitor. "I'm reckonin' to be one. Me an' work has been total strangers for more'n a month."

"Heard I was wantin' men—eh? Who was tellin' you?"

"A guy in Loma."

The other regarded the applicant suspiciously. His gaze roved with frank curiosity over the tall, lithe frame.

"Been in Loma long?"

"Holed up there for three days. Loma

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for August 14.

didn't like me a heap, I reckon. No better 'n I liked Loma. I'd have pulled my freight before now, but a guy which was boardin' my hoss allowed he'd ought to be paid for it. I reckon I'd have been roostin' in Loma yet if a soft-hearted hombre on a red hoßs hadn't squared things up for me."

"H-m. What you allowin' your name is?"

The visitor's lips parted in a slow, mirthless grin at the question. It was evident that he thought the other's curiosity unwarranted, even impertinent.

"You wantin' to hire a man or a name?" he said, eying his prospective employer with a saturnine eye. "If you're hirin' names, why, I reckon—"

He paused, reddened. His broad-brimmed hat came off, and he bowed with elaborate politeness to a girl who had appeared in the doorway behind the other man.

The girl's eyes were wide with interest; she stuck her head around the other man's shoulder and smiled cordially at the visitor.

"This man must be all right, father," she said. "He says he met Mr. Nelson." She looked directly at the visitor. "Was that the name of the man who rode the red horse?"

"He wasn't mentionin', ma'am. When we was talkin' he was a heap interested in watchin' me rastle with a mess of ham an' aigs he'd staked me to—me havin' no acquaintance with them any more'n bein' able to breathe the same air. But he looked straight enough to own to a handle like you gave him, ma'am. He was seven or eight feet high, looked like; considerable broad across the back. An' he was the sort of guy a man would like to be friendly with. My own name is Knable, ma'am—Lefty Knable."

"Your friend rode a red horse, you say?"

"Yes, ma'am—red. Looks like he was afire. A big hoss an' a big man. I reckon they're the same, ma'am. Once you throw your eyes on that combination you ain't forgettin' it. An' you've got it right, sayin' he's my friend. I ain't knowed him long, but that's the way I feel about him.

I'd be proud to throw in with him in anything he starts."

The girl's eyes glowed with a warm light as she smiled at Knable. She did not speak, but looked at her father. The other, seeming to understand the significance of her look, likewise smiled.

"I reckon you're hired," he said to Knable. "We've been needin' men. My outfit's with the wagon—south. The cook, too. But I reckon we'll not let you starve. There's room in the bunk-house for your traps. When you've got things straightened, come back here an' grub. Hustle, for things will be gettin' cold."

Knable worked fast. In less than ten minutes he was back on the ranch-house porch, washing from a basin that stood on a bench near the kitchen door. A few minutes later he was seated at a table in a big dining-room, and was being helped generously to food.

His host sat opposite him; and during a conversation that hinged upon cattle—always a subject of prime importance—Knable took stock of his employer.

The rancher was a big man—massive. He bore the look of having worked hard all his life; of having conserved his strength. He had a well-shaped head that sat solidly upon a short neck; his shoulders were broad, his arms huge. He was deep-chested, but owned an undeniable stomach, indicating that ease was no stranger to him. He was of middle age.

However, Knable was more interested in the girl than in her father. He had not failed to note the warm glance she had thrown at him when he had mentioned Shorty—or to use her own words, "Mr. Nelson"—and by linking the expression with what he had heard Shorty say to Blandell in the street in town, Knable divined that the girl's interest in Shorty was deeper than casual.

Perhaps Knable's divination was what caused him to smile into his plate several times. Certainly it was his desire to say something in favor of his new-found friend that prompted him deliberately to delay finishing his meal until his host had left the table. For after the girl's father had gone out, quietly announcing that he wanted to



"look around" the stable, Knable gazed at the girl with narrowed, humorous eyes.

"You know a guy named Blandell, ma'am?"

"Yes," said Helen. She sat erect, watching Knable intently, her eyes steady, though glinting with wonder. She thought at first that Knable had lied; that he was a friend of Blandell—until she saw one corner of his mouth droop in an unmistakable sneer.

"I reckon we all know men that ain't worth knowin', ma'am," he continued. "You ain't allowin' Blandell is a friend of yours?"

"No," said Helen shortly—and Knable's eyes quickened at the sharpness of her voice.

For a space he silently regarded her; then he said, grinning:

"Your Mr. Nelson ain't no friend of his, either. Mr. Nelson," he repeated, watching the girl closely. "Seems to me a regular guy like him ought to have a handle that a man could use without stiffenin' his tongue up."

"He has—it is 'Shorty.'"

"Shorty—eh?" Knable grinned widely. He had heard Shorty tell Blandell his name. "Well, I reckon his friends *would* call him that. Friend of yours, eh?"

"Well—yes," hesitating and dropping her gaze from Knable's, while she blushed furiously.

"I was wonderin'. When you said he was ridin' a red hoss it sort of struck me that you was the girl I heard him mentionin'."

"Mentionin'?" Do you mean that he was talking about me—in town?"

Knable grinned at the resentful flash of her eyes.

"Well, I reckon he couldn't help it. You see, he was explainin' some things to Blandell—after he'd knocked Blandell down for tryin' to pull a gun on him."

"Oh!" she said. For an instant she had feared that Shorty had violated the rules of conduct that prevent men from discussing those of the opposite sex; and there had been sheer relief in her exclamation; followed by a quick regret that she had doubted him.

"I reckon I ain't got no business shootin' off my gab about it," went on Knable. "But it won't hurt you none to know. An' it sure was mighty neat work—neat and complete."

"Tell me about it, please."

Knable related what had occurred. He did not refer to the part he had played in the drama, devoting his talents to a description of Shorty's actions, and concluding with a eulogy:

"That guy is sure a he-wolf when he gets goin'. He's big, an' there's more man to every inch of him than any guy I've ever seen."

Helen was silent for an instant; then she looked quickly at Knable.

"You said you saw him riding east—afterward. Did he leave town?"

Knable was aware of the breathless interest with which she regarded him during a silence. He deliberately lengthened it; looking gravely beyond her as though he were estimating the size of a picture on the wall behind her.

And then he answered slowly, with something of the drawl he had used when speaking to the crowd of men while holding up the group in Loma:

"Did I say he'd left town, ma'am? I reckon not. Lookin' back, I saw him ride the red hoss into the livery stable. If he's got as much sense as I think he has, he'll—" He paused, then continued eating.

"You were saying," prompted the girl. She was leaning forward, eagerly watching him.

Knable grinned at her. "Shucks, ma'am, was I sayin' somethin'?"

"Yes," said Helen. "You were saying: 'if he's got as much sense as I think he has, he'll'— You did not finish."

"I reckon I'm a box-head, ma'am; I've plumb forgot what I was thinkin' about!" declared Knable.

"Oh," said Helen.

Perhaps Knable thought he had mystified the girl with the uncompleted sentence. She could have completed it for him—after a while, when she had mentally repeated what had immediately preceded it. But that was when she was alone in the

house after Knable had gone out to join her father.

She blushed over the thought that Knable had been able to detect her interest in Shorty; but after her work was done she went to one of the big windows in the living-room—a window that faced the east—and stood for a long time looking into the distance that stretched between the ranch-house and Loma.

She met Knable again at supper. But there was no further reference to Shorty. The talk at the table was based upon the dry—and to her—uninteresting details of work to be done; of cattle and water and feed and round-ups; of many things that she had heard discussed all her days.

If they had talked of a big man on a red horse she would have watched them with interest in her eyes; for while they talked she was thinking of him—of how he had looked when she had seen him as he had halted at the water-hole; of how she had gone to sleep in his arms, trusting him implicitly at first sight, and how he had vindicated her trust with his honorableness, his gentleness, and his steady consideration.

She believed it was his gentleness that impressed her most; for he was so big that at first she had been afraid that gentleness could not abide in him. She had seen smaller men who had been louder of voice and more belligerent of attitude toward their fellows; seeming to seek to impress those they met with a large capableness that did not exist.

Capableness she had seen, was natural to Shorty, as natural as his gentleness. He was simple, sincere, straightforward. He had proved it to her.

And she could not get him out of her mind during supper, nor afterward, when her father and Knable had gone for a short ride. She drew a chair out upon the front porch and sank into it, leaning back and gazing meditatively into the eastern distance.

Twilight found her still there, still gazing eastward. Once she turned at a sound, and saw her father and Knable walking near one of the bunk-houses. She saw Knable's horse in the corral, with her

father's. She could not tell when they had come in.

And a little later she saw Knable go into one of the bunk-houses—the one nearest the ranch-house. And presently, while she sat, she heard her father's step behind her.

"Restin'—eh?" he said. "An' enjoyin' the view. Well, it's a hummer! An' the nights are just about right—not too warm an' not too cold. You know what your mother always said about the stars—on a night like this, Helen? Nights when there wasn't any moon? She said they wasn't stars at all, but just openin's in the earth's atmosphere, put there by God so's us mortals could get a look at heaven, behind them. I reckon there was a heap of poet in your mother, Helen."

Perhaps it was poetry that stirred Helen as she sat there. She did not know. Some emotion gripped her. It was strange, and so deep that it awed her; and it seemed to be linked to the water-hole and a big, tawny man who had ridden into her life like a heroic and romantic figure of the imagination.

She heard her father go to his room; she saw Knable's light in the bunk-house go out; and around her settled a silence complete and vast except for the murmuring night noises that seemed to be whisperings of the wind bearing mystic messages from the distant places.

Still she sat, gazing eastward. She could not have told how long she sat there; but the night noises were diminishing and the stars were growing brighter when she saw, far out on the level, a moving blot, faint and dim.

For a long time she watched the blot, noting that it seemed to grow larger and more distinct. And then, after a while, by leaning forward and peering intently toward it, she was finally able to see that the moving object was a horse—apparently riderless. She got up and walked to one of the slender porch columns and held tightly to it, watching with all the power of her eyes.

Twice as she watched she was on the point of calling to her father; and twice she decided she would not disturb him. But there came an instant when she left

the porch column and ran swiftly toward the horse.

For the horse was not riderless—and it was Red King.

She saw that the horse was coming slowly, and that upon his back, crumpled forward over the saddle-horn, was a man.

She knew, even before she reached him, that the man was Shorty. But without uttering a sound she gained Red King's head and drew him down. Then she ran to Shorty.

Shorty was lashed to the saddle with his own rope. He was limp and unconscious; his head was hanging so that it touched Red King's mane, and his arms were dangling with an inertness that hinted of dread finality.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE NEW BOSS.

**S**HORTY'S dreams had been troubled. There were times when he did not know whether he was asleep or awake, for there were periods when his dreams were so vivid that he felt he could be reasonably certain they were not dreams at all, but actual, living, waking incidents.

So it was with the figures he saw flitting around him, and with the voices he heard. On one occasion he was positive he saw the face of the girl of the water-hole near him, her eyes, large and anxious, peering at him. And there were other times when he heard the voices of men, and saw men's faces close to him. One of these he was certain belonged to the man who had been his guest at breakfast in Loma one morning—seemingly ages ago. And another seemed to belong to a man who insisted upon turning him over to look at his back, and who poured noxious potions down his throat. Still another face belonged to a big man who at times came and stood near him, seeming to look down at him.

And there were times when Shorty could not understand how it was that he seemed to see windows with sunlight streaming in them—sunlight subdued by gauzy things that fluttered like the wings of some giant bird. All these were puzzling, mysterious.

And yet Shorty was comfortable. He was lying on something that was very soft to the touch, with a fresh coolness that he thoroughly enjoyed. And under his head was something still softer than that upon which his body rested. It seemed to him that aeons of time had passed before he became aware of the comfort and the coolness of his body, for there had been an interminable period when he had been racked with pains and heat and a thousand other torturing sensations.

But gradually he was beginning to realize that the visions he saw were not all dreams. There was a time when he felt a hand on his forehead, gently smoothing it; and the sensation was so unusual that he found himself sitting up, only to be forced back again, and to hear a distant voice saying:

"Please lie down, Mr. Nelson."

The voice was so pleasant that he had replied to it, saying:

"I reckon I will, if you want it."

And then he had heard the same voice say, as though its owner were delighted over something:

"Oh, daddy; he is conscious!"

Certainly he was conscious; he had been conscious all along—all his life. That thought made him smile. But it seemed to be long before he heard a man's voice, saying:

"Yes; he's all right now. I'll be getting along. All he needs is care—lots of it. He's a pretty husky specimen; that kind of man will stand any amount of thumping around."

When Shorty was able to fix the fluttering things firmly in his vision—which he succeeded in doing on the third day after his arrival at the Circle Star—he saw that they were lace curtains.

Thereafter he saw other things, more clearly. And he began to remember what had happened to him.

He was lying motionless, flat on his back, staring at the ceiling and enjoying the cool breeze that swept over him, when he heard a sound and saw the girl he had met at the water-hole standing at the side of the bed looking down at him. He smiled at the quick leap of her eyes.

"I reckon I must have come back, ma'am. The last I remember I was headed this way."

"Go to sleep," she told him. Obediently he closed his eyes.

When he opened them again the girl was sitting in a chair near the bedside, gazing out of a window. For a long time he watched her, admiring the curves of her neck and throat, and the way her hair rippled in the breeze that came through the window.

"Did your dad hire any men lately?" he questioned.

She gave a little startled gasp and tiptoed to his side.

"You are not to talk," she said.

"Why," he objected; "I feel a heap like gettin' up, ma'am. I reckon a little talk wouldn't hurt none. Accordin' to my notion I ain't done any talkin' for more than a year."

"Three days," she smiled.

He moved slightly, and got one elbow under him, propping himself up with it.

"If you ain't got any objections—" he began.

She was leaning over him instantly, gently forcing him back, and emitting sharp little exclamations of dismay and apprehension. But what he paid attention to was that during the operation her face was very close to his; and the fragrance of her hair was all about him. He persisted, merely because of the exhilaration that contact with her provided, and at last had the satisfaction of feeling one of her hands on his forehead.

Thereafter, for some time, he lay quiet. And she retreated to her chair, though she brought it closer—where she could look at him without being obliged to turn.

"One thing is botherin' me," he said, after a while. "How did I get here?"

"On Red King. You were lashed to the saddle." She paused. "Did you do that?"

"I reckon I did."

"Who shot you?"

"Blandell, I reckon. I'd give him cause—accordin' to his way of thinkin'. His kind of man, I mean.

"I was headed this way, intendin' to

ask your dad for a job." He regarded her gravely while saying this, and was gratified to see her eyes quicken. "I'm not swearin' it was Blandell. It was somebody. The bullet went into my back—seemin' to burn through. The guy used a rifle, at close range."

"Yes," she said; "the doctor got the bullet out. You were very lucky. If it had been higher or lower you would not be here to-day."

"Then I'd have missed this"—he waved a hand around the room; adding—"an' you."

He marveled at the swift color that came into her face. But she did not answer, and he closed his eyes, not wishing her to know that he was aware of her embarrassment.

Replying to her request for additional information regarding the shooting, he went on:

"Why, I reckon there wasn't much to it, ma'am. I'd quit thinkin' for a while; and when my brain got to goin' again I saw Red King lyin' down beside me. I'd taught him that, long ago. I got on him after a while, an' after he got up I lashed myself to the saddle-horn—like you found me. Yes," he added, "I knowed it was you; but I couldn't do any thankin' just then. I'm doin' it now. Curious how Red King knowed where to bring me—wasn't it?"

"Yes—curious."

He laughed. "I reckon he'd got acquainted with you. Red King is a pretty wise hoss."

"And his master?" she smiled.

"His master wasn't very wise. If he had been he'd have stopped here the mornin' he brought you from the water-hole."

"But you said you had been comin' here when you were shot," she said, regarding him with mocking, dancing eyes.

"So I did," he returned, his lips twitching a little; "it took me a whole day to find out that I'd made a mistake in leavin' here."

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and turned her head so that he might not see her eyes.

"A man in Loma was tellin' me he was comin' here for a job," he went on. "A slim guy, tall, wearin' two guns an' ridin' a black hoss. Did he get the job?"

"Yes. He is somewhere with father, now. His name is Knable—'Lefty' Knable. He got the doctor—from Dry Bottom—for you."

She was wondering what he would have to say about his trouble with Blandell in Loma, or whether he would mention it at all. So she said, quietly:

"Did you meet Blandell in Loma?"

He looked quickly at her; saw guile in her eyes.

"Was you expectin' I'd meet Blandell?" he asked mildly.

"Mr. Knable said he saw you talking to Blandell."

He frowned. "I'll be havin' a talk with Mr. Knable when I get out of this," he threatened. "I trusted him a heap."

A smile was her reply to this; and she got up and raised the curtain of the window at the side of the bed so that the clear white light came stealing in. Thereafter, for some time, she busied herself about the room, while he lay there covertly watching her.

He noted that she limped a little as she walked; but he saw that a shoe encased the injured foot; and from that he gathered that on the day he had found her she had been suffering more from hunger and exhaustion than from pain.

He decided that she was more attractive than she had been on the morning he had helped her from the saddle after the journey from the water-hole. For one thing, she was not wearing the riding habit she had worn then—raiment that Shorty had always thought ridiculous, though of course inevitable if a woman persisted in riding straddle.

He had always had his own views on that subject, though he had never put them into words. He had always thought a woman looked better in clothing that suggested domesticity than in a garb that indicated a desire to imitate the opposite sex.

At any rate there was about her now an atmosphere that was essentially and exclusively feminine. She dominated the room, she gave to it that air of completeness and gentleness which makes a *home* of a place that would be merely a *house* if she were absent. She seemed to fit, to

belong; seemed to be living the part that nature had intended as woman's logical sphere.

And at this minute Shorty was an enthusiastic believer in nature's schemes of life and existence. He had never had a home of his own, but he had looked into other houses which had been made into homes by women, and he knew they were good.

The girl wore a dress of some striped material—a house dress—though Shorty was not familiar enough with such things to attempt to become technical. He only knew that it became her, revealing not too suggestively the graceful lines of her figure; that the neck was just low enough and the sleeves just short enough.

The last time he had seen her her hair had been in disorder—in maddeningly beautiful disorder which, while she had lain in his arms that morning had made him want to caress it—and her clothing had been soiled by the dust she had encountered during her long walk to the water-hole.

Now the hair was twisted and looped into heavy coils and waves. The beauty of it thrilled him.

He went to sleep watching her. When he again opened his eyes, Lefty Knable and a big man were in the room with him. Knable grinned broadly.

"Lefty Knable, eh?" said Shorty. "I'm a heap glad to meet you."

"You come mighty close to not bein' able to meet anybody," declared Knable grimly. "If you'd been like a lot of other guys—not quite so much man to you—the daisies would have got a right good start over the place where you'd have been planted." His grin broadened and then softened.

"But I reckon you'll live now—you'll live to understand that you made a mistake in lettin' Blandell off when you ought to have salivated him. Also, you'll live to work an' rassel a lot more of ham an' aigs—which you looked sort of scornful at a few days ago—lettin' me do the gobblin'."

He saw that Shorty's gaze had gone to the big man who was standing near, and he grinned guiltily.

"I reckon I ain't none polite—doin' all the gassin'," he said. "This is my new boss—Brail Kelton."

## CHAPTER XII.

### A TERRIFIC PROBLEM.

**S**HORTY closed his eyes. His hands, lying on the white counterpane, clenched with a rigidity that drove the blood out of them, leaving them white despite the tan. It seemed that all the blood in his body had suddenly surged into his brain, creating chaos in which only one coherent thought survived—the knowledge that at his bedside, so close that he might have reached out and touched him, was the man who had murdered his friend Larry Dillon.

Shorty had lived his life in a section of world in which men habitually concealed their emotions, keeping their likes and their dislikes to themselves. Such a habit nourishes self-control, fortifies against surprises, and permits clear thinking in emergencies.

Therefore, though Shorty was stunned with the revelation of the identity of the girl's father, he did not permit the passion that seethed through him to show in his eyes. When he opened them he looked straight at Kelton. There was a smile on his lips, faint, masking the sneer that lurked behind it. However, he could not wholly veil the hatred he felt for Kelton; far back in his eyes it gleamed as he looked at the man; a glint not to be seen by the other, because Shorty's lashes had narrowed until they were mere slits.

"Kelton, eh?" he said; "Brail Kelton. I'm mighty glad to meet you, Kelton."

"You've had a pretty close shave, Nelson," said the other. "My daughter was tellin' me that you thought Tim Blandell done it. I reckon you made a mistake in not borin' him when you was close to him in Loma."

Shorty smiled mirthlessly. "You believe in gettin' them first—eh, Kelton? Before they've got a chance to bore you in the back?"

"I don't take any chances with men like Blandell," said the other gravely.

Kelton certainly hadn't taken any chance with Larry Dillon, according to Blackburn's story. And he had shown Larry no mercy.

Shorty looked hard at the man, appraising him. It was evident that he possessed enormous strength, both mental and physical. There was a thrust to his chin which indicated either obstinacy or determination; his mouth was big, though the lips were well formed and firm; his eyes had little creases running into the corners, as though they sometimes narrowed humorously.

The eyes themselves were baffling gray. It seemed to Shorty as he looked into them that they slowly changed their color under his scrutiny, growing darker as he held their gaze, the pupils dilating as a result of some deep emotion the man was concealing. Yet they were steady—as steady as Shorty's.

Did Kelton know him? Shorty was aware that his friendship for Larry had been noted and commented upon widely; and it had seemed to him that Kelton's action in pinning the note on Larry's body must have been a deliberate challenge to Larry's friends—possibly a personal challenge to himself.

If that were the case—and Kelton knew him—the man's self-possession was remarkable. It meant that he would have to be careful how he moved until the moment came when he was ready to exact reparation for the killing of his friend; it meant that he must not permit the other to suspect that he knew him as the murderer, lest the other take advantage of his condition and do to him what he had done to Larry.

But there was a vein of grim humor in Shorty's attitude toward life, a certain recklessness which took no account of consequences.

While he still held Kelton's gaze he said slowly:

"I reckon you've been takin' care of Red King?"

"Meanin' your horse?" The gray eyes were still steady, the lashes unblinking.

"My hoss," returned Shorty. "I'm sort of careful of him. He's a present from

my old boss—Kane Lawler, of the Circle L."

Watching Kelton intently, Shorty was certain the man did not change expression. There was not even the flicker of an eyelash to betray that he was aware of the ulterior significance of Shorty's words.

Shorty grinned coldly at him.

"Kelton," he said, "you've heard of the Circle L?"

"I reckon everybody in the State has heard of it, Nelson. You boys fought that Antrim gang like wildcats. I gave Lawler my vote for Governor. But there were a lot of men around here that didn't—guys like Blandell." The gray eyes gleamed; the wrinkles around them deepened, plainly with satisfaction.

"Take it easy, Nelson," added Kelton, his body half turned to Shorty. "Your job of mendin' will be slow. There ain't no hurry. An' if you're figurin' on stayin' in this part of the country, I'd be glad to put you on my pay-roll when you're able to ride again."

"I'm stayin'," said Shorty.

He watched Kelton go out of the room. Kelton did not look back. Knable went out with him, and Shorty was left alone to reflect upon the unexpectedness of his meeting with the man he had been seeking.

Reviewing the incidents of the past few days he could see that the finger of destiny had seemed to guide his movements. There had been a time when he had thought of giving up the notion of going to Loma; it had been before he had talked with the stranger who had referred to the disreputable character of the town's citizens. But he had gone. On the way he had visited the Kelso water-hole just in time to meet Kelton's daughter. And when at last he reached Loma he had felt a strange reluctance toward going on. Something had seemed to draw him back, to bid him to return to the Circle Star. He had thought then that he had wanted to return because of a desire to see the girl again, but now he knew that Larry Dillon must have influenced him. For while he had been standing in the door of the livery stable in Loma, Larry had seemed to be very close to him.

He regarded the darkening world with

morose eyes, his lips twitching in an ironic smile. He had unexpectedly found Brail Kelton—and Brail Kelton was *her* father. Romance, which had seemed to be blazing for him a path to happiness, was now arranging a tragedy. Moreover, he owed his life to the daughter of the man he had come to kill; and he was now under that man's roof enjoying his hospitality.

When he thought of the girl—the way she had looked at him; when he considered how she had lain in his arms, confident of his honorableness; when he reflected upon the concern she had exhibited, and the light in her eyes when she had hovered over him when he had awakened that afternoon; and when he considered the longing in his heart for her, he was almost persuaded to forswear his vengeance.

But when his thoughts centered upon Larry; and when he mentally repeated what Blackburn had told him; when he again mentally read the note that had been found pinned to his friend's clothing, he knew that he could never break faith with the man who had been his companion through more than five years of a life that brought out the best in Larry—and it was that best which Shorty now saw, beloved traits accentuated by the lapse of time and the idealism of memory.

The darkness outside the window deepened, and after a while brilliant stars flickered in a velvety blue background of sky.

Shorty watched the stars steadily. And after a time he spoke:

"I'm seein' two trails, Larry. If you—"

A sound at the side of the bed brought him to a pause, and he slowly turned to see the girl standing near him. She was in a shaft of light that came through an open doorway behind her. She appeared to him like a slim wraith that had floated into the room.

"There—there," she said softly, soothingly. She laid a cool hand on his forehead. "Go to sleep, Shorty," she added gently; "you'll be having a fever again. Larry isn't here, you know."

It was plain to him that she thought the fever had returned, and that delirium was again gripping him.

He laughed grimly. "I reckon Larry's



here, right enough, ma'am. An' I'm wonderin' about him—wonderin' what he'd want me to do."

"Yes," she said, her hand still on his forehead; "I've heard you talk about Larry. It was while the fever had you. He was your friend, and somebody killed him. Wasn't that it?"

He was trying to see her face, but the light was behind her, and the luminous haze that came into the room from the window was not sufficient. His eyes were glowing with curiosity and eagerness.

"I talked, eh—talked about Larry. Did you hear me mention who killed him?"

"No."

"Anybody else hear me talk about Larry?"

"Only myself."

"Larry was my friend, ma'am." He paused and groped for words, then went on: "The man who killed him is still livin'. Do you reckon that's right?"

"Thou shalt not kill," said the girl solemnly.

"Are you sayin' that, or are you repeatin' what somebody else said?" he asked gravely, for it seemed to him that the sentence was authoritative.

"That is one of the commandments," replied the girl.

He smiled in the darkness, incredulously.

"I reckon the man who said it never had a friend murdered—a friend like Larry."

"The commandments are in the Bible."

He was silent long. Then he said slowly:

"There was times when Larry talked about the Bible, ma'am. Do you reckon he believed that—about killin'?"

"It is the law—God's and man's," she whispered. "Some time—when you are better—I will show you. Go to sleep now."

"All right, ma'am," he said. And then, as she went toward the door, he added:

"Good night, ma'am."

"Good night," she answered, and closed the door.

For a long time he gazed out of the window into the star-dotted blue of the sky. And after a while his thoughts resolved themselves into the spoken question, asked of the stars in a low, grave voice:

"Do you reckon there's only one *right* trail, after all, Larry?"

## CHAPTER XIII.

BY RED KING'S SIDE.

SHORTY had been impressed with the words spoken by Helen Kelton on the night he had regained consciousness. Somehow they had seemed to be invested with a solemn meaning which had had a direct, personal application. They had seemed to come, dignified by a strange, compelling simplicity, just in time to bid him pause to wonder if Larry would have counseled the vengeance he meditated.

Larry, he knew, had been impressionable, imaginative and religious. There had been times when he had watched Larry reading, marveling at the man's application and interest in a thing that he—Shorty—had always considered superfluous. His own creed was founded upon the principle of square dealing and of honesty, and he had always felt it to be sufficient.

However, he had never talked the matter over with Larry, nor had he questioned the wisdom of his friend's reading. It was not a matter for advice or interference.

But one thing he had noticed; that reading the Bible had seemed to have a calming effect upon his friend; it had seemed to make him impervious to the ordinary irritations of life; had brought to him a grave imperturbability, a serenity remarkable for its steadfast durability.

Larry had always seemed undisturbed by adversity, and unconcerned to the point of contempt for danger. There had been times when Shorty had read into his friend's habit of squinting his eyes a humorous defiance of death. For he had seen that squint in Larry's eyes more than once, when death seemed to confront him.

And so he wondered whether Larry would approve of his idea of vengeance, and as the days fled and he reflected upon Helen Kelton's words, he found himself undecided.

On the night Helen had talked to him about Larry, he had been impressed with her words. However, he had believed then,

and still believed, that it had been her manner which had brought him to ask the question of the stars. She had seemed to be filled with a grave sincerity—as though back of what she had said was authority complete and convincing, in which she believed. And she had brought upon him the mighty indecision that now afflicted him.

He had thought that night that his partial surrender to the merciful impulses which had seized him was due to his weakness—a weakness which had accentuated the effect of her words, and which had caused him to respond to an emotion which he would have ignored at other times.

But he was not certain. The girl had said enough to him to bring doubt into his mind, and he now kept seeing Larry as he had seen him often in life, reading, and seeming to exult in it.

Undecided, continually debating the question with a persistence which had brought furrows into his forehead, he endured the days of his convalescence with stoic calmness, and with taciturnity—especially when in the presence of Brail Kelton—that was commented upon by Lefty Knable.

"Shucks!" the latter said to him one day. "I reckon—if I didn't know you—I'd think you was an ungrateful cuss. I showed more thanks over them ham an' aigs than you're 'showin' the boss for furnishin' you chuck for more'n two weeks."

Shorty grinned at him. "Knable," he said; "you run a heap long on talk. I'm savin' my breath until I get strong on my legs again. Then I'm goin' to say things to you about what you told Helen Kelton about a thing that happened in Loma."

"So she told you that, eh?" grinned Knable. "Well, she was curious, an' I told her. Shucks! I was thinkin' to make you solid. An' now you're blamin' me. I reckon there ain't no way to anticipate your trail."

He narrowed his eyes at Shorty. "Mebbe you don't know, an' mebbe you do. But that girl's likin' you a heap, Shorty. When I was tellin' her I'd seen you in Loma she asked me kind of breathless: 'Did he leave town?' An' when I put off answerin' her until I liked to bust my neck tryin' to keep in what I knowed about the way she felt about you, she looked as though she'd like

to guzzle me for losin' my voice. If you've got any sense—"

He dodged a branch of chaparral that Shorty hurled at him, grinning hugely as he went to the corral to rope his horse.

Shorty was spending much of his time out of doors, sitting on a bench in the shade of the bunk-house a goodly portion of his time; for the wound, though healing rapidly, was not to be strained by excessive movements. He had been forbidden to ride by the Dry Bottom doctor who had visited him twice since the day of his restoration to consciousness, and time to him was a succession of lazy, endless days.

However, Helen Kelton had placed a big chair at the base of a small juniper tree near the rear door of the ranch-house, and in this, during the heat of the long days he spent much time.

Since the night she had talked with him about Larry the girl had not questioned him regarding the killing of his friend. However, she had looked at him oddly many times, as though she meditated renewing the talk; and several times when she had been with him in the shade of the juniper tree she had been on the point of speaking about Larry.

She had finished her work on this morning—a little more than two weeks following the conversation—and had come out a few minutes before, dressed as she had been on the day Shorty had first opened his eyes to see her near the bed.

He got up when he saw her approaching and smilingly waved her to the chair in which he had been sitting.

When she refused the chair he said lightly:

"I've been settin' in that chair so long that I'm scared it 'll get the notion I'm imposin' on it. I reckon when I get over this I'll never want to see a chair again."

She dropped into the seat and he stood back from it a little, frankly admiring her. She made a picture that brought a dull ache into his chest—an ache not caused by the wound he had received that night on the plains. For he realized that much as he longed for her, she was not to be his—that he was not even to consider he was entitled to think of her in those terms until he

definitely decided to forego his vengeance. And he had not yet decided to do so. He had been waiting—waiting, wondering, his brain a battle-ground for the conflicting emotions that the events of the past few weeks had aroused.

She was watching him steadily. Her manner was calm with something of the serenity that had been peculiar to Larry Dillon; her hands were folded rather limply in her lap; her lips were in reposeful curves; but there was speculation, curiosity, in her eyes. It was as though she had made up her mind to say something important to him, and she was trying to find words that would create an impression of casualness.

"Mr. Nelson," she began, "when you were delirious you talked much about a man you called 'Larry.'"

"So you said, ma'am." A slow grin swept over his face. "I reckon I'm in for a dressin' down, ma'am. Every time you go to callin' me Mr. Nelson I can look for it. Callin' me Mr. Nelson makes me feel like a stranger to myself, ma'am. I reckon I'll understand what you're goin' to say a whole lot better if you'll use my regular name."

"All right," she smiled. "According to the way you talked, you must have thought a great deal of Larry. But I never overheard you mention his last name."

"Dillon, ma'am—Larry Dillon."

"Larry," said the girl, ruminatively. "That is a nickname for 'Lawrence,' of course. But 'Larry' always suggested a brave, impulsive good-natured boy-man to me. I expect your Larry was all that?"

"You've got him right, ma'am."

She steadily watched Shorty's face—it had grown pale from an instant rush of memories of his friend, brought on by the gentleness of the girl's voice as she spoke of him.

"You had known him a long time, I suppose?" she continued. "An affection that makes a man yearn to kill for the sake of a friend must have been a long time in the making."

"I rode with him for more than five years, ma'am."

"How was Larry killed, Shorty?"

He told her, relating how Blackburn had found, appended to Larry's clothing, the

note with the murderer's name written upon it. He did not mention the name.

She did not ask him.

"And you have been searching for the murderer ever since?" she said.

"Only about a month, ma'am. You see, Lawler was away in the capital, an' I couldn't quit him without havin' a talk with him, to let him know for certain just why I was leavin'."

"When was Larry killed?"

"About a year ago—durin' the summer. On the 10th of June."

"It happened near Willets, you said?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"I heard of that fight," she said. "I suppose every one in the country heard of it." She looked keenly at him, and her voice was low:

"I wonder if you know that Tim Blandell was supposed to be a member of Blondy Antrim's gang?"

He smiled gravely at her. "I reckon Blandell would be," he said. "It struck me, soon as I saw him, that he was that kind. I'm havin' a talk with Blandell some day."

"I'd be careful," she warned. "Blandell has many friends in this section. In fact, if report is true, Antrim's headquarters were not far from Loma. And I have heard that the remnant of his band still meet there."

Shorty did not answer. He was not thinking about Blandell, nor the remnant of Antrim's band. He was thinking of the girl who sat near him.

On the night he had met her at the water-hole she had seemed to him to be shy, almost diffident, with an inclination toward trustfulness that appeared to be based upon warm impulses, sympathy, and understanding.

Now, while she still exhibited sympathy, there was about her an atmosphere of reserve, of constraint almost, which puzzled him. She seemed older, more sure of herself, less embarrassed in his presence; and several times Shorty caught her watching him with an expression that puzzled him.

And while they continued to talk she, deliberately introducing subjects which had no connection with the previous discussion,

Shorty studied her, trying to analyze the puzzling expression. And after a while, when he had definitely decided that it was a mixture of apprehension and suspicion, illumination came to him. He remembered that on the night he had spoken of Larry, and she had answered him, she had returned a hesitating "No" when he had asked her if he had mentioned the name of Larry's murderer.

He was convinced that he had mentioned Kelton's name; he was convinced that she knew he had come to kill her father—perhaps she even thought he had known the night he had been shot that the Kelton he sought owned the Circle Star.

Nothing else would explain the suspicion in her eyes; there could be no other reason for her interest in Larry Dillon, or for her detailed questioning regarding the crime, or for her attempt to dissuade him from the deed by quoting the commandment: "Thou shalt not kill."

To be sure, she was to be excused for making an attempt to shield her father, and Shorty was filled with pity for her because of her discovery of her father's crime, but he was not to be misled or influenced from his vengeance by any subterfuge or artifice; and the smile that flitted over his face was expressive of grim mockery.

Yet he did not want her to know that he was aware of her knowledge. There was a heaviness at his heart now—the heaviness of disillusionment; for he had entertained a hope that the things she had been telling him about the commandments might have swayed him to spare her parent. In fact, he had been on the point of yielding many times during the period of his convalescence, knowing that his surrender would be due in part to the effect on him of her words regarding the commandments. They had seemed to promise him a way out. But she had uttered them merely as a means of saving her father's life.

Shorty had turned from the girl and was morosely scanning the vast expanse of level land around him. In his heart was a passion much the same as that which had dwelt in it for the past year—a lust for revenge. He had become entirely unconscious of the girl's presence; he was thinking

of the baffling gray eyes of her father, and how those eyes had unwaveringly held his own on the night he had first seen Kelton.

He became aware of the girl's presence when he felt one of her hands on his arm. He turned, to see her standing close to him. Her face was pale, her lips were drawn and white, and her eyes were brilliant through a slight moisture in them. It seemed to him that she must have divined his thoughts; that she knew he was aware of her pitiful attempt to save her father, and that now she had decided to ask for mercy.

"Shorty," she said slowly; "I want you to promise not to shoot—or kill—anybody, until I have had another talk with you? Will you promise?"

"I reckon I can promise that, ma'am," he said gravely.

"You can," she smiled; "but *do* you promise?"

"I do, ma'am."

She smiled, said "Thank you" in a low voice, and went toward the ranch-house. Shorty saw her vanish through the kitchen door. He stood for a long time staring into the western distance; and then he dropped into the chair Helen had vacated.

Late that night, after Kelton had gone to bed, Red King, lying in a corner of the corral where there was still a suspicion of grass that had not been tramped to atoms by the countless hoofs that had danced upon it before his coming, whinnied recognition to a figure that stealthily let down the bars of the gate.

Red King got up eagerly and approached the figure, which threw both arms around his neck and hugged him gently. Exhibiting every indication of pleasure and submission, Red King followed the figure out of the corral, stood docilely by while the figure replaced the corral bars; and then again followed, to halt at the stable door.

Red King nickered with delight when a saddle was thrown upon his back; and opened his muzzle eagerly for the bit. And then, while the big horse was waiting expectantly for the figure to vault to his back with the old-time grace, another figure glided toward them from the ranch-house.

Red King recognized this figure, also;

and whinnied recognition. But the second figure did not approach Red King; it was met by the first figure, who had seemingly deserted the horse.

"Shorty," said the second figure, somewhat breathlessly, "you are not going for a ride at this time of night!"

"I was thinkin' of it, ma'am," said Shorty. "You see, I ain't done any ridin' lately, an' I'm gettin' kind of lonesome."

"But your wound! Why, you wouldn't ride very far until you had a relapse."

Shorty laughed. "I reckon it wouldn't hurt me a heap, ma'am."

"Shorty," she said, severely, her voice very low; "you were not going for a ride—you were going away."

Shorty did not answer.

"Weren't you? Tell me the truth!"

"I reckon I was, ma'am."

"And without saying a word to me—to any one?"

Shorty was silent.

"Shorty," she said, "why were you going away?"

To-night there was a moon, and by its light Shorty could look into the girl's eyes. What he saw there puzzled him, as he had been puzzled that day.

"Well, I've sort of give it up, ma'am," he said, smiling.

"You've given what up?" Her voice was very gentle.

"I've sort of give up the idea of findin' the man who killed Larry, ma'am. What you said about it not bein' lawful accordin' to God an' man to kill anybody has sort of got me to thinkin' that mebbe God knows what he's doin' in lettin' a man live who has killed another. You see, I come here to kill a man, if I found him. But since I've got here I'm seein' things some different. An' I'm intendin' to go back, without doin' it."

That was not entirely Shorty's reason. He knew that Helen Kelton knew her father was Larry's murderer; and he suspected that in time—perhaps not through her telling him, but in some mysterious way which time and the sequence of events would provide—Kelton would discover that his

daughter knew. And the mental punishment that would follow would be worse than any physical punishment that Shorty could administer. And if he had been mistaken; if Helen did not know—which was entirely possible despite the emotion she had betrayed that day—he had decided that he would never tell her.

He was now sorry that he had come at all; he regretted causing the girl the mental agony she must have endured for the two weeks following his return to consciousness. Had he known what he knew at this minute he would have wished Blandell's bullet had finished him.

He had had serious thoughts toward Helen; he had drawn mental pictures of her gracing a house he would build for her. But, of course, that had been merely a dream, depending upon his success in paying court to her.

The dream, of course, had been shattered; he had awakened to find that circumstances had conspired to make a marriage with her impossible. He might forgive Kelton for the killing of Larry, but there could be no genuine happiness between the three of them with them all possessing knowledge of Kelton's guilt. Such a situation could not endure—could not be.

And so he intended to return to the Circle L, to take up the old life where he had left it, and make the best of the incident.

To be sure, he would never forget that had things been different he might have been able to make those vague dreams come true. He might even have—

"Shorty!" Helen's voice interrupted his thoughts.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Do you mean that you have found Larry's murderer and are deliberately going away without punishing him?"

"I reckon that's about it, ma'am."

"Shorty," she said, her voice leaping, "who killed Larry?"

"I ain't reckonin' to mention it, ma'am."

"You must! I want to know—I will know!"

"I reckon you won't, ma'am—not by me tellin' you."

**This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.**

# Caesar's Choice

by Charles King Van Riper



**M**R. CAESAR made a remark about preferring to be the first citizen of an Iberian village rather than the second in imperial Rome. But times have changed since Cæsar's day. If the late lamented Julius had lived in this era of commuting he might have done both: might have caught the 7.08 out of Janusburg mornings and been in time to sell style-plus togas in the ready-to-wear department of the Eternal City Emporium. As an example of how it goes to-day, Henry Purdy was in rank of importance about the 2,978,053rd person in New York. But in Boynton, New Jersey—well!

If Mr. Purdy had qualified for the obituary column of the *Boynton Weekly Courier*, he would have been described with eulogistic elegance as having been "identified for the last twenty years with the Cataract Fire Hose Corporation." The unenameled truth is that Henry Purdy had a job in the concern's New York office, the same being situate in Barclay Street that city. There Mr. Purdy appeared punctually at eight every morning, put on his alpaca coat and green eye-shade, and took up the tasks at which he fussed around until five minutes before five in the afternoon.

Of course Purdy had been with the firm for twenty years, but then so had the oak railing and the picture of the concern's plant at Bayonne. For that matter, old Burrus was in his twenty-seventh year in the office, and Marty, the porter, had put

in precisely two decades and nine months of service, so Purdy didn't even have the distinction of being the oldest employee.

So far as keeping a set of books is concerned, brilliance isn't worth a hoot in perdition, and Purdy, puttering along steadily, was all that could be desired. Every one in the office, except the porter, called him "Purdy." Between these two it was always "Henry" and "Marty." But with the others it was always Purdy, the office-boys, stenographers, and young salesmen adding an accent of flippancy, old Burrus pronouncing it with the importance of one man of weighty affairs to another. Summers, the vice-president and active head of the company, was brusque and businesslike when he spoke to him, which was hardly ever except in consultation concerning the records. Young Denton, head of the business by inheritance, was pleasant enough when he was in the office, which wasn't very often, Mr. Denton being a golfer.

Purdy had come in close contact with the vice-president when the income tax law first went into force. There were certain modifications of the bookkeeping system that he wanted made; charging off things in new ways. Summers somehow seemed to have got the idea that Henry Purdy was responsible for the company having to pay out in taxes what would otherwise have gone to increase the dividends, so Purdy's experience with his boss had been a trying one.

For a considerable time afterward Purdy

felt that his relations with his employer were strained. To be sure, Summers was neither more curt nor abrupt than before, but Purdy felt he was being badly used, and felt—well, he felt it. If their positions had been reversed, Purdy would have let Summers know a few things.

Often, gnawing his pen-holder, he would pick and choose from among the several means of revenge. He would work out in detail just the manner in which he would treat Mr. Summers if it were in his power to deal as he willed with the man who had trifled with him. Then, when he had it all settled in his mind, he would go back to his bookkeeping.

There is one thing about little men, from Napoleon down. Give them a chance to boss anybody and they do it. Purdy was meek as Moses in the presence of his superiors, but when he was dealing with what unimportant underlings he had—well, Nero might have fiddled better, for Purdy had never taken violin lessons.

And how Purdy loved to crack the whip of authority! He would stretch up his thin neck—that was another thing about Purdy. Oversized automobile tires may be all right, but supersized linen collars serve no purpose, practical or artistic. And a strange thing about collars that don't fit is that it never seems so much that the collar is too big for the man as that the man isn't big enough for his collar.

But all this has to do with Mr. Purdy as two millionth and whatever it was in New York City. The prelude promised that the position of Mr. Purdy in Boynton, New Jersey, was quite another story. And this is it:

Boynton has three churches, a public library built by the heirs of the man the place was named for, a hotel called the American House, a hay, grain and feed place across from the station, an automobile hack moored beside the depot platform, and a public school on which the citizens spent forty thousand dollars and enough talk to make the *Congressional Record* look like an epigram.

To continue the catalogue: Boynton had a police force who wore eleven-double-E shoes, a mayor and common council, and

a recorder. The recorder was Henry Purdy.

Now it may not sound very impressive to say that a man is a recorder. And taking it day in and day out the recorder of the borough of Boynton was a negligible factor, except to boys who had been caught borrowing apples, some tramp who wanted to winter in the workhouse, or a man who hadn't paid his dog license. But there are times when even such peaceful and quiet communities as Boynton have their peace and quietude stripped from them by marauding malefactors. And then Henry Purdy, or whoever happened to be recorder, was prominent enough to have satisfied even such a limelight seeker as Cæsar himself. So far Henry Purdy's term had been uneventful, but he was potentially Boynton's person of prime importance.

But it must be remembered that in Boynton, our hero was Henry Purdy first and recorder afterward. The Purdys had always lived in that section of Jersey. The countryside was dotted with rural free delivery mail-boxes labeled Purdy. From Ezra Purdy down at Pluckemin to Payson Purdy up in Sussex County. They were a well-known family, the Purdys were, and in Boynton, Henry Purdy was better known than any of them.

He was one of the first of Boynton's population to "go to business in New York." Twelve years ago he had built a new house. His name was graven on the corner-stone of the forty thousand dollar school as a member of the then current Board of Education. Down at the American House, Henry Purdy had long been one of the oracles. He could call the policeman by his first name, rented a pew in the Methodist church, gave five dollars a year to the town baseball team, owned four shares of oil stock and a victrola. Moreover, he belonged, as they say, to the borough Board of Trade.

All of Mr. Purdy's meekness was left at the office with his alpaca coat. Out in Boynton, Purdy was the typical American citizen, free and independent; or, in common with his neighbors, believed that he was. Purdy was master in his house. He laid down the law: Mrs. Purdy laid down



the rugs (after she'd beaten them). Not that Mrs. Purdy need be sympathized with, for no matter how much work was to be done or what complaint was to be borne with, she met it cheerfully because she understood Henry. That seemed to console her tremendously.

People in Boynton understood vaguely that Purdy was employed in some sort of confidential capacity by the Cataract Fire Hose people. Anyhow, it was enough to know that in Boynton he was a person of considerable consequence, if not the first, at least one of the leading citizens of the little community: Recorder Purdy.

Now when Henry Purdy was chosen by the borough council to fill the office of recorder he swore true and faithfully to discharge his duties without fear or favor. And he had performed his office with such impartiality that, if any one had happened to think of it, they could have exclaimed with perfect propriety: "A Daniel come to judgment!" And this, if memory plays no trick, was the situation at the time Pete Bomeisler's dog was killed.

Not that Bomeisler's collie was an unusual sort of dog. He was just plain dog, more of him around the muzzle than a well-bred collie should have had, and also less length to his legs than a dog-fancier would have demanded. But Shep had one point that not many other dogs in town could boast: his master was a member of the common council.

The night after the collie's demise, Mr. Bomeisler appeared at the council meeting with grim resolve writ on his features.

"Gentlemen," he said, when at length he achieved the floor, "I guess some of you have heard that my Shep was killed last night."

There was more or less general interest.

"What I want to ask you," continued Councilman Bomeisler, beginning to get excited, "is how we would feel to-night if it had been a child that had been killed?" Mr. Bomeisler was working up a good head of emotional steam. It seemed to be choking him.

"Suppose it had been a child?" he challenged. "This meeting to-night would be an indignation meeting—not of the coun-

cil, but of the voters. That's what it would!" He whacked one palm against the other.

"And I propose, fellow members of council," Bomeisler thundered, "to make this an indignation meeting to-night. Of course it was only a dog, but it might just as easy have been Jordan's little boy"—Councilman Jordan blinked—"or Van Fleet's baby."

Van Fleet was one of the few who hadn't heard the details of Shep's taking off. He pictured gunmen shooting his two-year-old infant, or some arch fiend putting Paris green on its playthings. Van Fleet leaned over to Cunningham to be enlightened as to the particulars of Shep's departure.

"The time to lock the door," Bomeisler was saying, "is before the horse is stolen." (He neglected to explain the virtue of locking up if the horse was to be stolen anyway).

"Run over by an automobile," Cunningham was whispering to Van Fleet.

Then Bomeisler burst out with it.

"These automobiles," he cried, "are something awful in Boynton. We've got to do something to stop the speeding—especially Sundays. And the sooner the better, say I!"

Any one who has been at a borough council meeting knows what Bomeisler's declaration brought on. It was after twelve before Purdy, who had dropped in at the meeting to hear what was in the wind, got to his bed. And the next morning he just managed to make the last train that would get him to the alpaca coat and tooth-dented pen-holder in time.

It was three weeks before the Bomeisler resolution bore fruit, what with the three readings of the bill. Second and third readings were held the same night, but some reverence had to be shown red tape for the business before a borough council would be little indeed without that crimson encumbrance. Meanwhile the need for just such action had been further impressed on the community by a collision in which the station hack was scratched up by a swiftly driven touring-car that swept on its way without pausing.

The third Sunday after Mr. Bomeisler

had risen to remark what he had to say, saw the beginning of operations. The Bomeisler bill provided that on Sundays, Boynton engage two special motorcycle officers at five dollars a day to break up speeding through the borough streets. The appointments fell to Bob Acorn and Luke Pruitt, both of whom had motorcycles and were even more eager for the badge of authority than the monetary emolument. But there was another necessary factor in the situation! The court—Recorder Purdy.

So about ten o'clock on that bright Sunday morning, the speed trap was set by Boynton. The borough had three men of the hour: Young Acorn, Luke Pruitt, and Henry Purdy—and the greatest of these was Purdy.

Isn't there something in the witches' prologue of "Macbeth" about the watched pot never boiling? Well, no matter, watched motorists won't speed. Acorn and Pruitt may have had the wrong technique, and motorists may have speed, but at any rate (over the prescribed fifteen miles an hour) Bob and Luke couldn't catch them at it. The forenoon wore away, and Purdy, impatient after his morning of vain waiting, went home for Sunday dinner. He ate, at any moment expecting to hear the call of public duty. But there was no interruption, and he returned to the court-room in the borough hall to find that nothing had happened.

Bomeisler, uncomfortably aware that he stood in need of vindication, had been hovering around all day, Purdy and he having established headquarters in the committee-room that opened off the council chamber where court was held. Every time an automobile approached the borough hall, they would listen for it to stop, as if at the direction of Acorn or Pruitt. None did. About two o'clock Jordan and Cunningham dropped in.

"Looks as if we've given Bob and Luke presents of five dollars," observed Jordan. Bomeisler squirmed.

"Wait," he said, but somehow not very confidently.

"Yes, the day isn't over yet," put in Purdy, coming to the defense of the heck-

led Bomeisler. "Something's likely to turn up any minute. And I can tell you that any of them brought in here will get the full limit of the law." Then the whole discussion started over again.

It was fourteen minutes after four by the clock in the committee-room when the expected but despaired of happened. Cunningham, who had been sitting at the window, jumped up with a shout that he had seen Pruitt conveying a car up to the door of the borough hall. They all were on their feet.

"You stay here," said Bomeisler excitedly, restraining Purdy from following Cunningham and Jordan out of the ante-room into the council chamber where Pruitt would produce the prisoners. "Over to the court-house in Morristown," explained Bomeisler, "the judge never comes out of his chambers until the court-room is ready."

"Give 'em the limit!" was the councilman's parting urge. The recorder smiled reassuringly as he straightened the collar that looked as if it had been tossed over his head and settled to his shoulders, like a ring at a cane and knife rack.

Henry Purdy's hour had come. Now, if never before, he was first in Boynton; let his status in New York be what it might. There was a rap on the door.

As Purdy approached the portal in response to the summons, Bomeisler's voice announced ceremoniously: "The prisoners are in court." Purdy, trying to repress a smile of satisfaction, opened the door and stopped as if shot.

Pruitt's prisoners were Summers and young Mr. Denton.

When the managing vice-president of the Cataract Fire Hose Corporation saw his old employee in the doorway, his face lighted up. Purdy indistinctly heard Summers greet him with a cordial "Hell-o-o-o, Purdy!" But he was more concerned with the kind of figure he was cutting in front of Bomeisler, Jordan, Cunningham, and Luke Pruitt.

Purdy managed to get out an uncertain "Good afternoon, Mr. Summers," and nodded toward young Denton, who was togged out in golfing tweeds.

"So you're the judge here!" exclaimed Summers jovially. "Guess we're in luck, eh, Denton?" The managing vice-president was enjoying a boisterous laugh to which Denton joined a pleasant one.

"Fact is, Purdy," admitted Summers confidentially, "we were hitting it up a bit coming into town, and I don't particularly blame the officer here for stopping us, especially as two children have been killed lately."

That was the cue for the three councilmen and even the bewildered Purdy to look in surprise at Pruitt. The special officer kept his face straight, but it was plain Luke had been using poetic license to juggle Shep's death and the station hack collision into infant fatalities.

"I'll give you my word we won't do it again," agreed Summers bluffly. At about that time it must have occurred to him that Purdy was strangely quiet—not exactly responsive.

Bomeisler, Cunningham, and Jordan expected him to do his bounden duty by Boynton. And Summers and Mr. Denton doubtless supposed, and under the circumstances not without warrant, that Purdy would wink at their arrest and call it quits. Purdy temporized.

"These gentlemen," he explained falteringly to the three councilmen, "are the president and vice-president of my concern."

It wasn't particularly relevant and there were no replies.

In reality Purdy had merely uttered one of the conditions that was running through his head. And as that thought thudded—thudded—thudded, conscience kept incessantly whispering the other condition, the words of his oath: "Without fear or favor." All personal ill-will toward Summers was forgotten. This was a big issue. He reflected wretchedly that the crisis might have come as a judgment for his petty grudge. But there was nothing petty about this business: it was his job or his honor.

Denton drew out his watch and looked at it suggestively.

"Mr. Summers," began Purdy with a breathless muster of speech, "you are

charged with having exceeded the speed limit."

"He was traveling better than twenty-five," put in Pruitt.

"How do you plead?" continued Purdy. Summers stared in astonishment. "You're—you're not in earnest," he began, then exclaimed jovially: "Oh, come on, Purdy, a joke's a joke."

Summers himself was growing red now—red and angry. Denton intervened.

"I understand, Purdy, that you intend to fine us," he said crisply, but not unpleasantly as he thrust a hand into the pocket of his knickerbockers.

Purdy gulped and nodded.

"How much?" asked Denton. His hand, withdrawn, held a roll of banknotes.

Purdy looked around desperately. Summers was glaring as if he would have found cannibalism a convenience. "Fifty dollars," said Purdy, and moistened his lips.

It was Cæsar's choice, and Henry Purdy had chosen to be first in his suburban Iberia. But in the instant of decision he felt the tremors of the Roman doom. There was a blur where Denton had been standing, but beyond loomed the ominous bulk of Summers.

Dimly he heard Denton saying "and ten is fifty," as the last bill was laid on top of two twenties already paid into Purdy's hand.

Summers seemed about to blow up, but the president of the Cataract company caught his arms and started him toward the door.

"The damned nerve of him!" muttered Summers.

"Forget it," said Denton under his breath. "It's worth fifty dollars any time to find that a man is honest." Denton turned at the door with a nod and wave of farewell, then they were gone.

Luke Pruitt let out a whoop, while the councilmen fell to congratulating each other.

But all Purdy could do was nervously to ease the collar at his throat. And the collar couldn't have been so big for him after all or he wouldn't have felt that it was choking him.

# The Metal Monster

by A. Merritt

Author of "The Moon Pool," "Conquest of the Moon Pool," etc.

(In collaboration with Dr. Walter T. Goodwin, Ph.D., I. A. S., F. R. G. S., etc.)

LIKE Mr. Merritt's narrative of "The Moon Pool" (published in *All-Story Weekly*, June 22, 1918), and "The Conquest of the Moon Pool" (*All-Story Weekly*, February 15 to March 22, 1919), "The Metal Monster" is published with the consent and authority of the International Association of Science. After the expeditions described in the earlier narratives, Dr. Walter T. Goodwin was placed at the head of a special bureau of the association and supplied with unlimited means to prosecute his investigations. Upon his recent return from Central Asia he gave Mr. Merritt the manuscript of his report, to be prepared for popular presentation. In its popularized form it is presented herewith.

## PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

WHILE traveling in the mountains of Turkestan Dr. Goodwin met Dick Drake, an American engineer. In a valley they saw a colossal imprint crushed into the stone—a curved heel with four claws, each twenty feet long, extending from it. Next day, while traveling an ancient road that passed through a hollow, they were almost overcome by an unseen force that sapped their strength. Winning through they met an American girl, Ruth Ventnor, daughter of a scientist, and her brother Mart. From them they learned that one night two men—the first humans they had seen for months—had come close to their fire and discussed Ruth with exceeding frankness—in archaic Persian. Awakening she had fired at them, and wounded one. Next day they had seen a body of soldiers, dressed and armed like the legions of ancient Darius, approaching, apparently in search of them. They had escaped.

Ruth showed Dr. Goodwin and Dick a number of small metal objects, that formed geometrical designs that moved with intelligence. Metal—with a brain!

Attacked by the pursuing Persians they saw standing in a fissure in the mountain the figure of a woman. At her command hundreds of metal objects—the "Metal Things" formed themselves into a giant that struck out and destroyed the attackers. Speaking in ancient Persian the woman told them that she was "Norhala." She was beautiful—but not entirely human. At her command they followed her into the fissure—which proved to be a passage hewed by human hands—mounted platforms formed by the "Metal Ones," and were swept away through the mists and through an opening in the mountain.

Then came a hair-raising journey through the wonders of an unknown world—although overhead they could see the familiar stars. Ruth, they were horrified to find, was becoming like Norhala—from her face shone forth the impassiveness of the Infinite. At the end of the journey Norhala took the travelers before a strange—edifice—altar—machine?—they could find no name for it—formed of glistening, greenish cones and spinning, golden disks. With the weird guardians of these cones Norhala communicated. She and Ruth were lifted up by some strange force, and when Mart fired at one of the creatures a lance of green flame darted at him and left him a broken wreck. Norhala saved him from further punishment; told Dr. Goodwin and Dick that the Thing—had given them to her for playthings; ordered them to carry Mart and follow her, and led the way through a wall of light.

Mart was not dead, and Dr. Goodwin tried to revive him with an injection of strychnine. And as he worked he realized that the intelligence that ruled in this strange world and looked upon man as a plaything was a Mind of Metal—a Metal Monster!

This story began in the *Argosy-Allstory Weekly* for August-7.

## CHAPTER XX.

"I WILL GIVE YOU PEACE."

IN our concentration upon Ventnor none of us had given thought to the passing of time, nor where we were going. We had stripped him to the waist, and while Ruth had massaged head and neck, Drake's strong fingers had been kneading chest and abdomen. I had used to the utmost my somewhat limited medical knowledge.

We had found no mark nor burn upon him, not even upon his hands over which had run the licking flame. The slightly purplish, cyanotic tinge of his skin had given way to a clear pallor; the skin was itself disquietingly cold, the blood-pressure only slightly subnormal. The pulse was more rapid, stronger; the breathing faint but regular, and with no laboring. The pupils of his eyes were contracted almost to the point of invisibility.

I could get no nervous reactions whatever. I am familiar with the effects of electric shock and know what to do in such cases, but Ventnor's symptoms while similar in part, presented other features unknown to me and most puzzling. There was a passive automatism, a perplexing muscular rigidity which caused arms and legs, hands and head to remain, doll-like, in any position placed.

Several times during my labors I had been aware of Norhala gazing down upon us; but she made no effort to help, nor did she speak.

Now, my strained attention relaxing with the plain improvement in his condition, I began to receive and note impressions from without. There was a different feeling in the air, a diminution of the magnetic tension; I smelled the blessed breath of trees and water.

The light about us was clear and pearly, about the intensity of the moon at full. Looking back along the way we had been traveling, I saw a half mile away the vertical, knife-sharp edges of two facing cliffs, the gap between them a mile or more wide.

Through them we must have passed, for beyond were the radiant mists of the pit of the city, and through this precipitous

gateway filtered the enveloping luminosity. On each side of us uprose gradually converging and perpendicular scarps along whose base huddled a sparse foliage.

There came a low whistle of astonishment from Drake; I turned. We were slowly gliding toward something that looked like nothing so much as a huge and shimmering bubble of mingled sapphire and turquoise, swimming up from and two-thirds above and the balance still hidden within earth. It seemed to draw to itself the light, sending it back with gleamings of the gray-blue of the star sapphire, with pellucid azures and lazulis like clouded jades, with glistening peacock iridescences and tender, milky blues of tropic shallows.

Little turrets globular and topaz, yellow and pierced with tiny hexagonal openings clustered about it like baby bubbles just nestling down to rest. Great trees shadowed it, unfamiliar trees among whose glossy leaves blossomed in wreaths flowers pink and white as apple-blossoms. From their graceful branches strange fruits, golden and scarlet and pear-shaped, hung pendulous.

It was an elfin palace; a goblin dwelling; such a bower as some mirthful, beauty-loving Jinn King of Jewels might have raised from his enchanted hoards for some well-beloved daughter of earth.

All of fifty feet in height was the blue globe. Up to a wide and ovaled entrance ran a broad and shining roadway. Along this the cubes swept and stopped.

"My house!" murmured Norhala.

The attraction that had held us to the surface of the blocks relaxed, angled through the changed and assisting lines of force; the hosts of minute eyes sparkling quizzically, interestedly, at us, we gently slid Ventnor's body; lifted down the pony.

"Enter!" sighed Norhala, and waved a welcoming hand.

"Tell her to wait a minute," ordered Drake. He slipped the bandage from the pony's head, threw off the saddle-bags, and led it to the side of the glistening roadway where thick, lush grass was growing, spangled with flowerets. There he hobbled it; rejoined us. Together we picked up Ventnor and passed slowly through the portal.

We stood in a shadowed chamber. The light that filled it was translucent, and oddly enough with little of the bluish quality I had expected. Crystalline it was; the shadows crystalline, too, rigid—like the facets of great crystals. And as my eyes accustomed themselves I saw that what I had thought shadows actually were none.

They were slices of semitransparent stone like pale moonstones, springing from the curving walls and the high dome, and bisecting and intersecting the chamber. They were pierced with oval doorways over which fell glimmering metallic curtains—silk of silver and gold.

I glimpsed a pile of this silken stuff near by, and as upon it we laid our burden Ruth caught my arm with a little frightened cry. Through a curtained oval had sidled a figure. Black it was and tall; its long, gnarled arms swung apelike; its shoulders were distorted, one so much lower than the other that the hand upon that side hung far below the knee.

It walked with a curious, crablike motion. Upon its face were stamped the countless wrinkles of an incredible age; its blackness was less that of pigmentation than the weathering of unbelievable years, the very stain of ancientness. And about neither face nor figure was there anything to show whether it was man or woman.

From the twisted shoulders a short and sleeveless red tunic fell. Incredibly old the creature was—and by its corded muscles, its sinewy tendons, as incredibly powerful. It raised within me a half sick revulsion, loathing. But the eyes were not ancient, no! Irisless, lashless, black and brilliant they blazed out of the face's carven web of wrinkles, intent upon Norhala and filled with a flame of worship.

It threw itself at her feet, prostrate, the inordinately long arms outstretched.

"Mistress!" it whined in a high and curiously unpleasant falsetto. "Great lady! Goddess!"

She stretched out a sandaled foot, touched one of the black taloned hands, and at the contact I saw a shiver of ecstasy run through the lank body. "Yuruk," she began, and paused, regarding us.

"The goddess speaks! Yuruk hears!

The goddess speaks!" It was a chant of adoration.

"Yuruk! Rise! Look upon the strangers!" She took up the sentence she had broken. This creature she named Yuruk—and now I knew what it was—writhed, twisted, and hideously apelike crouched upon its haunches, hands knuckling the floor.

By the amazement in the unwinking eyes it was plain that not till now had the eunuch taken cognizance of us. The amazement fled, was replaced with a black fire of malignancy, of hatred—jealousy!

"Augh!" he snarled; leaped to his feet; thrust an arm toward Ruth. She gave a little cry, cowered against Drake.

"None of that!" He struck down the clutching arm sharply; dipped and drew his automatic; covered the threatening figure from his hip. But not more quickly than I.

"Yuruk!" There was a hint of anger, of mercilessness in the bell-toned voice. "Yuruk, these belong to me! No harm must come to them. Yuruk—beware!"

"The goddess commands? Yuruk obeys." If fear quavered in the words, beneath was more than a trace of a sullenness, too, sinister enough.

"That's a nice little playmate for her new playthings," muttered Drake. "If that bird gets the least bit gay—I shoot him, *pronto!*" He gave Ruth a reassuring hug. "Cheer up, Ruth. Don't mind that thing. He's something we can handle."

Norhala waved a white hand; Yuruk sidled over to one of the curtained ovals and through it, reappearing almost instantly with a huge platter upon which were fruits, and some curdy white liquid in bowls of thick porcelain.

"Eat," she said, as the gnarled black arms placed the platter at our feet.

"Hungry?" asked Drake. Ruth shook her head violently.

"I'm going out for the saddle-bags," said Drake. "We'll use our own stuff—while it lasts. I'm taking no chances on what the Yuruk lad brings—with all due respect to Norhala's good intentions."

He started for the doorway; the eunuch blocked his way.

"We have with us food of our own, Norhala," I explained. "He goes to get it."

She nodded, indifferently; clapped her hands. Yuruk shrank back, and out strode Drake.

"I am weary," sighed Norhala. "The way was long. I will refresh myself—"

She stretched out a slender foot toward Yuruk; he knelt, unlaced the turquoise bands, drew off the sandals. Her hands sought her breast, dwelt for an instant there.

Down slipped her silken veils, clingingly, slowly, as though reluctant to unclasp her; whispering they fell from the high and tender breasts, the delicate rounded hips, and clustered about her feet in soft petalings as of some flower of pale amber foam; out of the calyx of that flower arose the gleaming miracle of her body crowned with the glowing glory of her cloudy hair!

Naked she was, yet clothed with an unearthly purity, the purity of the far-flung, serene stars, of the eternal snows upon some calm, high-flung peak, the tranquil, silver dawns of spring; protected by some spell of divinity which chilled and slew the flame of desire. A maiden Ishtar, a virginal Isis; a woman—yet with no more of woman's lure than if she had been some exquisite and breathing statue of mingled ivory and milk of pearls.

So she stood for a breath, indifferent to us who gazed upon her, withdrawn, musing, as though she had forgotten us. And that serene indifference, with its entire absence of what we term sex consciousness, revealed to me how great was the abyss between us and her; as great, nay greater, perhaps, than that between her and her metal servitors, her metal master!

Slowly she raised her arms, wound the floating tresses into a coronal. I saw Drake enter with the saddle-bags; saw them drop from hands relaxing under the shock of this amazing tableau; saw his eyes widen and fill with wonder and half-awed admiration.

Now she stepped out of her fallen robes and moved toward the further wall, Yuruk following her. He stooped, raised an ewer of silver and began gently to pour over her

shoulders its contents. Again and again he bent and filled the vessel, dipping it into a shallow basin from which came the bubbling and chuckling of a little spring. And again I marveled at the marble smoothness and fineness of her skin on which the caressing water left tiny silvery globules, gemming it. The eunuch slithered to one side, drew from a quaint chest clothes of white floss; patted her dry with them; threw over her shoulders a silken robe of blue.

Back she floated to us; hovered over Ruth, crouching with the pale head upon her knees. A motion she made as though to draw the girl to her; hesitated as Ruth's face set in a passion of denial. A shadow of kindness drifted through the wide, mysterious eyes; a shadow of pity joined it as she looked curiously down on Ventnor.

"Bathe," she murmured, and pointed to the pool. "And rest. No harm shall come to any of you here. And you—" A hand rested for a moment lightly on the girl's curly head, "if you desire it—I will again give you—peace!"

She parted the curtains, and the eunuch still following, was bidden beyond them.

## CHAPTER XXI.

"A VOICE FROM THE VOID!"

HELPLESSLY we looked at each other. Then called forth perhaps by what she saw in Drake's eyes, perhaps by another thought, Ruth's cheeks crimsoned, her head drooped; the web of her hair hid the warm rose of her face, the frozen pallor of Ventnor's.

There came a faint rustling from behind those curtains through which Norhala had vanished. They swayed. From beneath them spun and glided a score or more of the smallest of the metal things—the little ones as she had called them. Among them was none of the spheres, only the cubes and pyramids.

They ran about us, circled and leaped like playful children, peering at us, their myriads of tiny sparkling eyes twinkling mischievously! Suddenly they raced toward the oval doorway, swept into a circle



which revolved with swiftly increasing rapidity.

There was a small wailing, weirdly infantile; a shifting of shape too quick to catch; a blue brilliancy, a tiny crackling. An arrow of phosphorescence flashed up and through the portal. The little things were gone!

We sprang to the doorway, stared out. Something like a tiny azure meteor was speeding through the air toward the gateway of the cliffs; passed them and vanished like a shooting star into the radiance beyond!

"A messenger," grunted Drake. "Probably sent to tell the boss she reached home all right with her new—toys! She's—" He paused, gripped my arm, pointed. "Goodwin—what's that?"

Out of the vaporous distance another meteor was speeding—toward us. Larger it grew and larger; now it was a wingless dragon streaming sapphire flames. It left behind a trail of violet luminescence!

Forgetful of peril we ran from the portal, staring upward to watch its passing. Almost overhead its line of flight changed; it spiraled, then shot vertically downward. A hundred feet away there was a dazzling flash of blue incandescence. Yet before that flare blinded me I saw that the flying thing had not crashed as it fell; that it had instead struck with a terrifying catlike softness.

And down its upright side I thought a great sphere dropped and rolled toward Norhala's dwelling!

My darkened sight cleared. Where the radiance had gushed forth a gigantic square column stood, black, like a headless obelisk. Suddenly it swayed, bowed forward and back; upon the motionless pedestal of half its height the upper half spun in a wide circle like a teetering top. Then from its base blazed again the blue incandescence; came the noise of the shattering of hundreds of great panes of glass.

The pillar soared; it cleared the air with an incredible swiftness, darted like a wingless dragon back whence it had come, flashed like a blue meteor through the gateway of the cliffs and vanished as had the other in the vapors.

We ran toward where it had towered, half on the lush grass and half on the polished roadway. Upon the latter there was no trace of it, but in the green mat at the side was a blackened imprint, an oblong twenty feet in length and five wide, with two triangular, spreading claws! And its edges were die cut, grass and flowerets were damascened within it as had been tree and twig and poppy within the mark of the valley, as had been dust and debris of the mark in the dragoned chamber; stamped into a matrix of earth compressed by unimaginable force into stone!

"But if that's what does it," Drake was clearly thinking aloud, his voice dazed—"if it's that—how the hell big must have been the Thing that stamped the poppy valley? Why—why it must have been like a mountain—a mountain of metal hurtling down there. Goodwin!" he turned to me. "Goodwin—what was it? Why did it come—"

"Quick! To Ruth!" I set off at a run to the house, cursing myself for my forgetfulness, heart beating wildly; for his questions had recalled to me the Shape I thought I had seen slip down the Flying Thing when it had struck. We raced through the door—and with a sob of relief I saw her still there as we had left her, brooding over her brother.

"Ruth," I panted, "did anything come in?"

"No." She raised surprised eyes. "No—I saw nothing. There was a strange noise, and light flashed through the door—that was all."

"What was it?" asked Drake. I told him.

"An ambassador—or a friend who just happened in for a bit of a chat on his 'plane," he said sardonically. "Anything's possible in this joint, Doc."

He beckoned me to the saddle-bags, out of ear-shot of Ruth.

"We're in a hell of a hole, Goodwin," he whispered grimly. "I'll say that we are. It's a fact that sticks up like a sore thumb out of a sea of lassitude and *laises faire*—if you get what I mean. It's time for a powwow—"

"Walter! Dick!" There was panic

hope in Ruth's call. "Quick! Something's happening to Martin!"

Before she had ceased we were beside her; bending over Ventnor. His lips were opening, slowly, slowly—with an effort agonizing to watch. Then from his half-open mouth his voice came through lips that scarcely moved; faint, faint as though it floated from infinite distances, a ghost of a voice whispering with phantom breath out of a dead throat.

"Hard! Hard! So hard!" the whispering complained. "Don't know how long I can keep connection—with voice. Can't tell whether speaking—or thinking. Words and thoughts so much one where I am—can't tell—you have to piece out what I say."

"Was fool to shoot. Sorry—might have gotten you in worse trouble—but suppose crazy with fear for Ruth—thought, too, might be worth chance. Sorry—not my usual line, yet not sure—something outside myself, something bigger seemed force me—perhaps not fool thing—sorry, though."

The thin thread of sound ceased. I felt my eyes fill with tears; it was like Ventnor to flay himself like this for what he thought stupidity, like him to make this effort to admit his supposed fault and crave forgiveness—as like him as that mad attack upon the flaming disk in its own temple, surrounded by its ministers, had been so bafflingly unlike his usual cool, collected self.

"Martin," I called, bending closer, "it's nothing, old friend. No one blames you. Try to rouse yourself."

"Dear," it was Ruth, passionately tender, "it's me! Can you hear me?"

"Only speck of consciousness and motionless in the void," the whisper began again. "Terribly alive, terribly alone. Seem outside space yet—still in body. Can't see, hear, feel—short-circuited from every sense—but in some strange way realize you—Ruth, Walter, Drake, Norhala."

"See without seeing—here floating in darkness that is also light—black light—indescribable. In touch, too, with these—"

Again the voice trailed into silence; returned, word and phrase pouring forth disconnected, with a curious and turbulent rhythm, like rushing wave crests linked by

half-seen threads of the spindrift, vocal fragments of thought swiftly assembled by some subtle faculty of the mind as they fell into a coherent, incredible message.

"Group consciousness—gigantic—operating within our sphere—operating also in spheres of vibration, energy, force—above, below one to which humanity reacts—perception, command forces known to us—but in greater degree—cognizant, manipulate unknown energies—senses known to us—unknown—can't realize them fully—impossible cover, only impinge on contact points akin our senses, forces—even these profoundly modified by additional ones—metallic, crystalline, magnetic, electric—inorganic with every power of organic—consciousness basically same as ours—profoundly changed by differences in mechanism through which it finds expression—difference our bodies—theirs."

"Conscious, mobile—inexorable, invulnerable. Getting clearer—see more clearly—see—" the voice shrilled out in a shuddering, thin lash of despair—"No! No—oh, God—no!"

Then clearly and solemnly:

"And God said: let us make man in our image, after our likeness, and let them have dominion over all the earth, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth."

A silence; we bent closer, listening; the still, small voice took up the thread once more—but clearly further on. Something we had missed between that text from Genesis and what we were now hearing; something that even as he had warned us, he had not been able to make articulate. The whisper broke through clearly in the middle of a sentence.

"Nor is Jehovah the God of myriads of millions who through those same centuries, and centuries upon centuries before them, found earth a garden and grave—and all these countless gods and goddesses only phantom barriers raised by man to stand between him and the eternal forces man's instinct has always warned him stand ever in readiness to destroy; that do destroy him as soon as his vigilance relaxes, his resistance weakens—the eternal, ruthless law that will annihilate humanity the instant it

runs counter to that law and disintegrating turns its will and strength against itself—instead of marching in unison behind them as a shield against the enemy—as a phalanx into the unknown.”

A little pause; then came these singular sentences:

“Weaklings praying for miracles to make easy the path their own wills should clear! Beggars who whine for alms from dreams! Shirkers each struggling to place upon his god the burden whose carrying and whose carrying alone can give him strength to walk free and unafraid, himself Godlike among the stars!”

And now distinctly, unfalteringly the eery voice went on:

“Dominion over all the earth? Yes—as long as man is fit to rule; no longer. Science had warned us. Where was the mammal when the giant reptiles reigned? Slinking hidden and afraid in the dark and secret places. Yet man sprang from these skulking mammals.

“For how long a time in the history of earth has man been master of it? For a breath—for a cloud’s passing! And will remain master only until something grown stronger than he wrests mastery from him—even as he wrested it from his ravening kind—as they took it from the reptiles—as did the reptiles from the giant saurians—which snatched it from the nightmare rulers of the Triassic—and so down to whatever held sway in the murk of earth dawn!

“Life! Life! Life! Life everywhere struggling for completion! Life crowding other life aside, battling for its moment of supremacy, gaining it, holding it for one rise and fall of the wings of time beating through eternity—and then—hurled down, trampled under the feet of another straining life whose hour has struck!

“Life crowding outside every barred threshold in a million circling worlds, yes, in a million rushing universes; pressing against the doors, bursting them down, overwhelming, forcing out those dwellers who had thought themselves so secure.

“And these—these—” the voice suddenly dropped whole octaves, because thickly, vibrantly resonant, “over the Threshold,

within the House of Man—nor does he even dream that his doors are down! Things—Things of metal whose brains are thin—ing crystals—Things that suck their strength from the sun and whose blood is the lightning!

“The sun! The sun!” he cried. “There lies their weakness!”

The voice rose in pitch, grew strident.

“Go back to the city! Go back to the city! Goodwin! Drake! They are not invulnerable! No! The sun—strike through the sun! Go into the city—not invulnerable—the Keeper of the Cones—the Cones that—the Keeper of the Cones—ah-h-h-ah—”

We shrank back appalled, for from the parted, scarcely moving lips in the unchanging face a gust of laughter, mad, mocking, terrifying, racked its way. “Vulnerable—under the law—even as we! The Keeper of the Cones!

“Guard Ruth!” he gasped. A faint tremor shook him; slowly the mouth closed.

“Martin! Brother!” wept Ruth. I thrust my hand into his breast; felt the heart beating—slowly, but regularly, with a curious suggestion of stubborn, unshakable strength, as though every vital force had concentrated there as in a beleaguered citadel. But Ventnor himself, the consciousness that was Ventnor was gone; had withdrawn into that subjective void in which he had said he floated—a lonely sentient atom, his one line of communication with us cut; severed from us as completely as though he were, as he had described it, outside space.

And white-faced, pale-lipped Drake and I gazed deep into each other’s haunted eyes, neither daring to be first to break the silence of which the muffled sobbing of the girl seemed to be the sorrowful soul.

## CHAPTER XXII.

“FREE! BUT A MONSTER!”

THE peculiar ability of the human mind to slip so readily into the refuge of the commonplace after or even during some well-nigh intolerable crisis has been to me long one of the most interesting

phenomena of our psychology. It is instinctively a protective habit, of course, acquired through precisely the same causes that have given to the animals their protective coloration—the stripes, say, of the zebra and tiger that blend so cunningly with the barred and speckled shadowings of bush and jungle, the twig and leaflike shapes and hues of certain insects; in fact, all that natural camouflage which was the basis of the art of concealment so astonishingly developed in the late war.

Like the animals of the wild, the mind of man moves through a jungle—the jungle of life, passing along paths beaten out by the thought of his countless forefathers in their progress from birth to death. And these paths are bordered and screened, figuratively and literally, with bush and trees of his own selection, setting out and cultivation—shelters of the familiar, the habitual, the customary. On these ancestral paths, within these barriers of usage, man moves hidden and secure as the animals in their haunts—or so he thinks.\*

Outside them lie the wildernesses and the gardens of the unknown, and man's little trails are but rabbit-runs in an illimitable forest. But they are home to him!

Therefore it is that he scurries from some open place of revelation, some storm of emotion, some strength-testing struggle, back into the shelter of the obvious; finding in an intellectual environment that demands no slightest expenditure of mental energy or initiative, strength to sally forth again into the unfamiliar.

I crave pardon for this digression. I set it down because now I remember how, when Drake at last broke the silence that had closed in upon the passing of that still,

small voice the essence of these thoughts occurred to me.

Determinedly he strode over to the weeping girl, and in his tones was a roughness that angered me until I realized his purpose.

"Get up, Ruth!" he ordered. "He came back once and he'll come back again. Now let him be and help us get a meal together. I'm hungry."

She looked up at him, incredulously, indignation rising.

"Eat!" she exclaimed. "You can be hungry!"

"You bet I can—and I am," he answered cheerfully. "Come on; we've got to make the best of it."

"Ruth," I broke in gently, "we'll all have to think about ourselves a little if we're to be of any use to him. You must eat—and then rest."

"No use crying in the milk even if it's spilt," observed Drake, even more cheerfully. "I learned that at the front where we got so we'd yelp for the food even when the lads who'd been bringing it were all mixed up in it!"

Carefully she lifted Ventnor's head from her lap, rested it on the silks; arose, eyes wrathful, her little hands closed in fists as though to strike him.

"Oh—you brute!" she whispered. "And I thought—I thought— Oh, I hate you!"

"That's better," quoth Dick, and smiled upon her. "Go ahead and hit me if you want. The madder you get the better you'll feel."

For a moment I thought she was going to take him at his word; then her anger fled.

"Thanks—Dick," she said quietly; and

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\* And in this is the explanation, I think, of why the mind that lacks the creative element of imagination strives always so fiercely and bitterly against the imaginative. The imaginative mind is the finder of new paths, the pioneer, the seeker; the unimaginative is the developer, the consolidator of the new worlds found by its opposite. There would be no progress without the creative, imaginative mind; there would, possibly, be no practical results from the discoveries of the advanced intelligence without the methodical, plodding activities of its duller brother. One supplements the other—but with this difference; the creative intellect is independent of its stolid kin, while the latter is dependent upon it for any advances in knowledge it may enjoy. The unimaginative mind betrays itself by its love for old saws and proverbs, its clinging to the obvious and the known—which, by the way, it never can realize was but yesterday neither the obvious nor the known. It resents the "different" because it has not the ability to adjust itself quickly to new conditions or new points of view. It creates nothing, contributes nothing to human progress, looks with suspicion upon the slightest deviation from the commonplace, persecutes or ridicules and sometimes crucifies those who try to lift it from its slough. Yet it is, I suppose, as necessary to the human ferment as the dregs are to the wine.—W. T. G.

while I sat studying Ventnor, they put together a meal from the stores, brewed tea over the spirit-lamp with water from the bubbling spring; and in these commonplace I knew that she at least was finding relief from that strain of the abnormal under which we had labored so long. To my surprise I found that I was hungry, Drake was plainly so, and with deep relief I watched Ruth partake of food and drink even though lightly.

About her seemed to hover something of the ethereal, elusive, and disquieting. Was it the strangely pellucid light that gave the effect, I wondered; and knew it was not, for as I scanned her covertly, I saw fall upon her face that shadow of inhuman tranquility, of unearthly withdrawal which, I guessed, had more than anything else maddened Ventnor into his attack upon the disk.

Plainly I saw her fight against it, drive it back. White lipped, she raised her head and met my gaze. And in her eyes I read both terror and—shame.

Clearly it came to me that painful as it might be for her the time for questioning had come.

"Ruth," I said, "I know it's not necessary to remind you that we're in a tight place. Every fact and every scrap of knowledge that we can lay hold of is of the utmost importance in enabling us to determine our course.

"I'm going to repeat your brother's question—what did Norhala do to you? And what happened when you were floating before the disk?"

The blaze of interest in Drake's eyes at these questions changed to amazement at her stricken recoil from them.

"There was nothing," she whispered—then defiantly—"nothing. I don't know what you mean!"

"Ruth!" I spoke sharply now, in my own perplexity. "You do know. You must tell us—if not for our sake, then for his." And I pointed toward Ventnor.

She drew a long breath.

"You're right—of course," she said unsteadily. "Only I—I thought maybe I could fight it out myself. But you must know—there's a—a taint upon me!"

"A taint!" I cried, and caught in Drake's swift glance the echo of my own thrill of apprehension for her sanity.

"Yes," she said, now quietly. "Some new and alien thing within my heart, my brain, my soul; that came to me from Norhala when together we rode the flying block, and that—he—sealed upon me when I was in—his"—again she crimsoned, and whispered—"embrace."

And as we gazed at her, incredulously:

"A thing that urges me to forget you two—and Martin—and all the world I've known; that tries to pull me from you—from all—to drift untroubled in some vast calm filled with an ordered ecstasy of peace. And whose calling I want, God help me, oh, so desperately to heed!

"It whispered to me first," she went on breathlessly, "from Norhala—when she put her arm around me. It whispered and then seemed to float from her and cover me like—like a substance, and from head to foot. It was a quietness and peace that held within it a happiness at one and the same time utterly tranquil and utterly wild.

"I seemed to be at the threshold of unknown ecstasies—and the life I had known only a dream—and you, all of you—even Martin, dreams within a dream. You weren't—real—and you did not—matter!"

"Hypnotism," muttered Drake, as she paused.

"No." She had heard him; she shook her head. "No—more than that. The wonder of it grew—and grew. I thrilled with it. I remember nothing of that ride, saw nothing—save that once when through the peace enfolding me pierced warning that Martin was in peril, and I broke through upon its path to see him clutching Norhala and to see floating up in her eyes death for him!

"And I saved him—and again forgot. Then, when I saw that beautiful, flaming Shape—I felt no terror, no fear—only a tremendous — joyous — anticipation, as though—as though—" She faltered, hung her head, then leaving that sentence unfinished, whispered: "And when—it—lifted me it was as though I had come at last out of some endless black ocean of despair into the full sun of paradise!"

"Ruth!" cried Drake, and at the shocked wonder in his cry I saw her wince.

"Wait," she said, and held up a little, tremulous hand. "You asked—and now you must listen."

For an instant she was silent; and when once more she spoke her voice was low, curiously rhythmic; her eyes rapt:

"I was free—free of every human fetter of fear or sorrow or love or hate; free even of hope—for what was there to hope for when everything desirable was mine? And I was elemental; one with the eternal things yet fully conscious that I was—I!"

"It was as though I were the shining shadow of a star afloat upon the breast of some still and hidden woodland pool; as though I were a little wind dancing among the mountaintops; a mist whirling down a quiet glen; a shimmering lance of the aurora pulsing in the high solitudes. And there was music—strange and wondrous music and terrible, but not terrible to me—who was a part of it; vast chords and singing themes that rang like clusters of little swinging stars and harmonies that were like the very voice of infinite law resolving within itself all discords. And all—all—so ordered, so—so mathematical—passionless, yet—rapturous!"

"Out of the Thing that held me, out from its many colored fires pulsed a very essence of vitality—inexplicable, a flood of inhuman energy in which I was bathed. And it was as though this energy were—reassembling—me, fitting me even closer to the elemental things, changing me fully into them.

"I felt the little tendrils touching, caressing—then came the shots! Awakening was—dreadful, a struggling back from drowning. I saw Martin—blasted! I drove the—the spell away from me, tore it away. And, O Walter—Dick—it hurt—it hurt—and for a breath before I ran to him it was like—like coming from a world in which there was no disorder, no sorrow, no doubts, a rhythmic, harmonious world of light and music, into—into a world that was like a black and dirty kitchen!"

"And it's there," her voice rose, hysterically. "It's still within me—the taint; whispering, whispering; urging me away

from you, from Martin, from every human thing; bidding me give myself up, to surrender my humanity to—to what? And for—what? Ah—that I do know!"

"Its seal," she sobbed. "No—his seal! An alien consciousness sealed within me, that strives to make the human me a slave—that waits to overcome my will—and if I surrender gives me freedom, an incredible freedom—and makes me, being still human, a—monster!"

She hid her face in her hands, quivering.

"If I could sleep," she wailed. "But I'm afraid to sleep. I think I shall never sleep again. For sleeping how do I know that—it—may not then conquer me?"

I caught Drake's eye; he nodded, understanding fully my unspoken question. I slipped my hand down into the medicine-case, brought forth a certain potent and tasteless combination of drugs which I carry invariably upon explorations.

A little I dropped into her cup, then held it to her lips. Like a child, unthinking, she obeyed the suggestion and drank.

"But I'll not surrender!" Her eyes were tragic. "Never think it! I can win—don't you know I can?"

"Win?" Drake dropped down beside her, drew her toward him. "Little girl and bravest little girl I've ever known—of course you'll win. And remember this—nine-tenths of what you're thinking now is purely overwrought nerves and weariness. You'll win—and we'll win, never doubt it."

"I don't," she said. "I know it—oh, it will be hard—but I will—I will—"

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE HOUSE OF NORHALA.

HER eyes closed, her body relaxed; the potion had done its work quickly. We laid her beside Ventnor on the pile of silken stuffs, covered them both with a fold of blanket, then looked at each other long and silently—and I wondered whether my face was as grim and drawn as his.

"It appears," he said at last, curtly, "that it's up to you and me for powwow quick. I hope you're not sleepy."

"I am not," I answered as curtly; the edge of nerves in his manner of questioning doing nothing to soothe my own, "and even if I were I would hardly expect to put all the burden of the present problem upon you by going to sleep."

"For God's sake don't be a prima donna!" he flared up. "I meant no offense."

"I'm sorry, Dick," I said. "We're both a little—jumpy, I guess."

He nodded; gripped my hand.

"It wouldn't be so bad," he muttered, "if all four of us were all right. But Ventnor's down and out, and God alone knows for how long. And Ruth—has all the trouble we have and some special ones of her own. I've an idea"—he hesitated—"an idea that there was no exaggeration in that story she told—an idea that if anything she underplayed it."

"I, too," I replied somberly. "And to me it is the most hideous phase of this whole situation—and for reasons not all connected with Ruth," I added.

"Hideous!" he repeated. "Unthinkable—yet all this is unthinkable. And still—it is! And Ventnor—coming back—that way, God! That was awful, too! Like a lost soul finding voice!"

"Was it raving, Goodwin? Or could he have been—how was it he put it in touch with that Thing and its purpose? Was that message—truth?"

"Ask yourself that question, Dick," I said. "Man—you know it was truth! Had not inklings of it come to you even before he spoke? They had to me. His message was but an interpretation, a synthesis of facts I, for one, lacked the courage to admit."

"I, too," he nodded. "But he went further than that. What did he mean by the Keeper of the Cones—and that the Things—were vulnerable under the same law that orders us? And why did he command us to go back to the city? How could he know—how could he?"

"There's nothing inexplicable in that, at any rate," I answered. "Abnormal sensitivity of perception due to the cutting off of all tactile impressions. There's nothing uncommon in that. You have its most familiar form in the sensitivity of the blind.

You've watched the same thing at work in certain forms of hypnotic experimentation, haven't you?"

"Through the operation of entirely understandable causes the mind gains the power to react to vibrations that normally pass unperceived; is able to project itself through this keying up of perception into a wider area of consciousness than the normal. Just as in certain diseases of the ear the sufferer, though deaf to sounds within the average range of hearing, is fully aware of sound vibrations far above and far below those the healthy ear registers."

"I know," he said. "I don't need to be convinced. But we accept these things in theory—and when we get up against them for ourselves we doubt."

"How many people are there in Christendom, do you think, who believe that the Saviour ascended from the dead, but if they saw it to-day would insist upon medical inspection, doctor's certificates, a clinic, and even after that render a Scotch verdict? I'm not speaking irreverently—I'm just stating a fact. And my answer is, perhaps, one in a hundred thousand."

Suddenly he moved away from me, strode over to the curtained oval through which Norhala had gone.

"Dick," I cried, following him hastily, "where are you going? What are you going to do?"

"I'm going after that Norhala devil," he answered, pausing for a moment. "I'm going to have a show-down with her or know the reason why!"

"Drake," I cried again, aghast, "don't make the mistake Ventnor did! That's not the way to win through. Don't—I beg you, don't."

"You're wrong," he answered stubbornly. "I'm going to get her. She's got to talk."

He thrust out a hand to the curtains. Before he could touch them they were parted. Out from between them slithered the black eunuch. He stood motionless, regarding us; in the ink-black eyes a red flame of hatred, menacing, diabolic. I pushed myself between him and Drake.

"Where is your mistress, Yuruk?" I asked.



"The goddess has gone," he replied sullenly.

"Gone?" I said suspiciously, for certainly Norhala had not passed us. "Where?"

"Who shall question the goddess?" he whined. "She comes and she goes as she pleases."

I translated this for Drake.

"He's got to show me," he said. "Don't think I'm going to spill the beans, Goodwin. But I want to talk to her. I think I'm right, honestly I do."

After all, I reflected, there was much in his determination to recommend it. It was the obvious thing to do—unless we admitted that Norhala was superhuman; and that I would not admit. In command of forces we did not yet know, *en rapport* with these People of Metal, sealed with that alien consciousness Ruth had described—all these, yes. But still a woman—of that I was certain. And surely Drake could be trusted not to repeat Ventnor's error.

"Yuruk," I said brutally, "we think you lie. We would speak to your mistress. Take us to her."

"I have told you that the goddess is not here," he said. "If you do not believe it is nothing to me. I cannot take you to her for I do not know where she is. Is it your wish that I take you through her house?"

"It is," I said.

"The goddess has commanded me to serve you in all things," he bowed sardonically. "Follow."

Our search was short. We stepped out into what for want of better words I can describe only as a central hall. It was circular, and strewn with thick piled small rugs whose hues had been softened by the alchemy of time into exquisite, shadowy echoes of color, while the cuneiform shape of their woven inscriptions confirmed their ancientness.

The walls of this hall were of the same moonstone substance that had enclosed the chamber upon whose inner threshold we were. They whirled straight up to the dome in a crystalline, cylindrical core. Four doorways like that in which we stood pierced them. Through each of their curtains in turn we peered,

All were precisely similar in shape and proportions, radiating in a lunetted, curved base triangle from the middle chamber; the curvature of the enclosing globe forming back wall and roof; the translucent slicings the sides; the circle of floor of the inner hall the truncating lunette.

The first of these chambers was utterly bare. The one opposite held a half-dozen suits of the lacquered armor, as many wicked looking, short and double-edged swords and long javelins. The third I judged to be the lair of Yuruk; within it was a copper brazier, a stand of spears and a gigantic bow, a quiver full of arrows leaning beside it. The fourth room was littered with coffer great and small, of wood and of bronze, and all tightly closed.

The fifth room was beyond question Norhala's bedchamber. Upon its floor the ancient rugs were thick. A low couch of carven ivory inset with gold rested a few feet from the doorway. A dozen or more of the chests were scattered about and flowing over with silken stuffs.

Upon the backs of four golden lions stood a high mirror of polished silver. And close to it, in curiously incongruous domestic array stood a stiffly marshaled row of sandals. Upon one of the chests were heaped combs and fillets of shell and gold and ivory studded with jewels blue and yellow and crimson.

To all of these we gave but a passing glance. We sought for Norhala. And of her we found no shadow. She had gone even as the black eunuch had said; flitting unseen past Ruth, perhaps, absorbed in her watch over her brother; perhaps through some hidden opening in this room of hers.

Summoned by that globe I had thought I had seen drop from the back of the Flying Thing? It might be.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### SOME CERTAINTIES.

YURUK let drop the curtains, sidled back to the first room, we after him. The two there had not moved. We drew the saddle-bags close, propped ourselves against them.

The black eunuch squatted a dozen feet away, facing us, chin upon his knees, taking us in with unblinking eyes blank of any emotion. Then he began to move slowly his tremendously long arms in easy, soothing motion, the hands running along the floor upon their talons in arcs of circles. It was curious how those hands seemed to be endowed with a volition of their own, independent of the arms upon which they swung!

And now I could see only the hands, shutting so smoothly, so rhythmically back and forth—weaving so sleepily, so sleepily back and forth—black hands that dripped sleep—hypnotic.

Hypnotic! I sprang from the lethargy closing upon me! In one quick side glance I saw Drake's head nodding—nodding in time to the movement of the black hands! I jumped to my feet, shaking with an intensity of rage unfamiliar to me; thrust my pistol into the wrinkled face.

"Damn you!" I cried. "Stop that! Stop it and turn your back!"

The corded muscles of the arms contracted, the claws of the slithering paws drew in as though he were about to clutch me; the ebon pools of the eyes were covered with a frozen film of malignant hate.

He could not have known what was this tube with which I menaced him; but its threat he certainly sensed and was afraid to meet. Lips drawn in a devilish sneer he squattered about, wrapped his arms around his knees, crouched with back toward us.

"What's the matter?" asked Drake drowsily.

"He tried to hypnotize us," I answered shortly. "And pretty nearly did it."

"So that's what it was!" He was now wide awake. "I watched those hands of his and got sleepier and sleepier—I guess we'd better tie Mr. Yuruk up." He jumped to his feet.

"No," I said, restraining him. "No. He's safe enough as long as we're on the alert. I don't want to use any force on him yet. Wait until we know we can get something worth while by doing it."

"All right," he nodded grimly. "But when the time comes I'm telling you straight, Doc, I'm going the limit. There's

something about that human spider that makes me itch to squash him—slowly!"

"I'll have no compunction, Dick—when it's worth while," I answered as grimly.

We sank down again against the saddlebags; he brought out a black pipe, looked at it sorrowfully; at me appealingly.

"All mine was on the pony that bolted," I answered his wistfulness.

"All mine was on my beast, too," he sighed. "And I lost my pouch in that spurt from the ruins."

He sighed again, clamped white teeth down upon the stem.

"Of course," he said at last, "if Ventnor was right in that—that disembodied analysis of his, it's rather—well, terrifying, isn't it?"

"It's all of that," I replied, "and considerably more."

"Metal," he said, Drake mused. "Things of metal with brains of thinking crystal and their blood the lightnings! You accept that?"

"So far as my own observation has gone—yes," I said. "Metallic yet mobile; inorganic but with all the qualities we have hitherto thought only those of the organic and with others added. Crystalline, of course, in structure and highly complex. Activated by magnetic-electric forces consciously exerted and as much a part of their life as brain energy and nerve currents are of our human life. Animate, moving, sentient combinations of metal and electric energy."

He said:

"The opening of the disk from the globe and of the two blasting stars from the pyramids show the flexibility of the outer—plate would you call it? I couldn't help thinking of the armadillo after I had time to think at all."

"It may be"—I struggled against the conviction now strong upon me—"it may be that within that metallic shell is an organic body, something soft—animal, as there is within the horny carapace of the turtle, the nacreous valves of the oyster, the shells of the crustaceans—it may be that even their inner surface is organic—"

"No," he interrupted, "if there is a body—as we know a body—it must be be-

tween the outer surface and the inner, for the latter is crystal, jewel hard, impenetrable.

"Goodwin—Ventnor's bullets hit fair! I saw them strike. They did not ricochet—they dropped dead from that shining Thing. Like flies dashed up against a rock—and the Thing was no more conscious of their striking than a rock would have been of those same flies!"

"Drake," I said, "my own conviction is that these creatures are absolutely metallic, entirely inorganic—incredible, unknown forms. Let us go on that basis."

"I think so, too," he nodded; "but I wanted you to say it first. And yet—is it so incredible, Goodwin? What is the definition of vital intelligence—sentience?"

"Haeckel's is the accepted one. Anything which can receive a stimulus, that can react to a stimulus and retains memory of a stimulus must be called an intelligent, conscious entity. The gap between what we have long called the organic and the inorganic is steadily decreasing. Do you know of the remarkable experiments of Lillie upon metals?"

I shook my head.

"Lillie," he went on, "proved that under the electric current and other exciting mediums metal exhibited practically every reaction of the human nerve and muscle. It grew weary, rested, and after resting was perceptibly stronger than before; it got what was practically indigestion, and it exhibited a peculiar but unmistakable memory. Also it could acquire disease and die.

"Lillie concluded that there existed a real metallic consciousness! It was Le Bon who first proved also that metal is

more sensitive than man, and that its immobility is only apparent.\*

"Take the block of magnetic iron that stands so gray and apparently lifeless, subject it to a magnetic current, and what happens? The iron block is composed of molecules which under ordinary conditions are disposed in all possible directions indifferently. But when the current passes through there is tremendous movement in that apparently inert mass. All of the tiny particles of which it is composed turn and shift until their north poles all point more or less approximately in the direction of the magnetic force.

"When that happens the block itself becomes a magnet, filled with and surrounded by a field of magnetic energy; instinct with it. Outwardly it has not moved; actually there has been prodigious motion!"

"But it is unconscious motion," I objected.

"Ah, but how do you know it is?" he asked. "If Jacques Loeb is right, that action of the iron molecules is every bit as conscious a movement as the least and the greatest of our own. There is absolutely no difference between them.

"Your and my and its every movement is nothing but an involuntary and inevitable reaction to a certain stimulus. If he's right, then I'm a buttercup—but that's neither here nor there. Loeb—all he did was to restate destiny, one of humanity's oldest ideas, in the terms of tropisms, infusoria and light! Omar Khayyam chemically reincarnated in the Rockefeller Institute! Nevertheless those who accept his theories have to admit that there is essentially no difference between their impulses and the rush of filings toward a magnet.†

\* It is not my intention to reproduce in full this discussion of ours by which we sought to clarify our minds and to construct from the unfamiliar a foundation of the known from which to proceed. Yet, I do feel it essential to apprise the reader of the gist of it for the better understanding of the continuation of this narrative. For those who have sufficient curiosity to pursue this fascinating subject of the sensitivity of metal I advise them to read the reports of Professor Ralph S. Lillie, of Clark University, upon his experiments. They can be found in his printed papers. Le Bon, in his "Evolution of Matter," Chapter 11, writing on the same subject, says: "Endorsed with an unconscious sensibility greater than the conscious sensibility of any living being. This is why such an expression as 'the life of matter,' utterly meaningless twenty-five years ago, has come into common use. The study yields ever-increasing proofs that it has properties which were formerly deemed the exclusive appanage of living beings."

† Professor Jacques Loeb, of the Rockefeller Institute, New York, "The Mechanistic Conception of Life." His theory is that every action and impulse, physical or mental of every living thing is only a blind, mechanical response to some external stimulus or stimuli, exactly, as Drake put it, like the rush of filings toward a magnet.—W. T. G.

"Equally nevertheless, Goodwin, the iron does meet Haeckel's three tests—it can receive a stimulus, it does react to that stimulus and it retains memory of it; for even after the current has ceased it remains changed in tensile strength, conductivity and other qualities that were modified by the passage of that current; and as time passes this memory fades. Precisely as some human experience increases wariness, caution, which keying up of qualities remains with us after the experience has passed, and fades away in the ratio of our sensitivity plus retentiveness divided by the time elapsing from the original experience—exactly as it is in the iron."

## CHAPTER XXV.

### CONSCIOUS METAL!

"GRANTED," I acquiesced. "We now come to their means of locomotion. In its simplest terms all locomotion is progress through space against the force of gravitation. Man's walk is a series of rhythmic stumbles against this force that constantly strives to drag him down to earth's face and keep him pressed there. Gravitation is an etheric—magnetic vibration akin to the force which holds, to use your simile again, Drake, the filing against the magnet. A walk is a constant breaking of the current."

"Take a motion picture of a man walking and run it through the lantern rapidly

and he seems to be not walking but flying.\* We have none of the awkward fallings and recoveries that are the tempo of walking as we see it.

"I take it that the movement of these Things is a conscious breaking of the gravitational current just as much as is our own movement, but by a rhythm so swift that it appears to be continuous.

"Doubtless if we could so control our sight as to admit the vibrations of light slowly enough we would see this apparently smooth motion as a series of leaps—just as we do when the motion-picture operator slows down his machine sufficiently to show us walking in a series of stumbles.

"Very well—so far, then, we have nothing in this phenomena which the human mind cannot conceive as possible; therefore intellectually we still remain masters of the phenomena; for it is only that which human thought cannot encompass which it need fear."

"Metallic," he said, "and crystalline! And yet—why not? What are we but bags of skin filled with certain substances in solution and stretched over a supporting and mobile mechanism largely made up of lime? Out of that primeval jelly which Gregory calls Protobion† came after untold millions of years us with our skins, our nails, and our hair; came, too, the serpents with their scales, the birds with their feathers; the horny hide of the rhinoceros and the fairy wings of the butterfly; the shell of the crab, the gossamer loveliness

\* All motion is relative; its one varying factor being time. The snail and the express train are one and the same so far as their motion is concerned. The force of gravitation is constantly at work striving to keep each inert. Their progress, like ours, is a series of successive breakings away from gravitational force and the rate of progress is in the direct ratio of the time taken to effect these contact breakings. Gravitation, according to the newest and best scientific thought, is an energy which works entirely independent of time. It takes light one second to travel one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles. The birth of a baby on earth is instantaneously recorded by gravitational changes in the farthest stars!—W. T. G.

† J. W. Gregóry, F. R. S., D. Sc., professor of geology at the University of Glasgow. This is the concept that on the muddy shallows of the young world the development of life may have been affected by two stages. First, the formation of a complex jelly—Protobion—mainly composed of carbonaceous compounds which would be formed of the various constituents existing in the primeval atmosphere; second, the development of a catalyser—literally an exploder—which would give this jelly the power to break up various available compounds for food; and their reduction would endow the jelly with a supply of internal energy which in time set in motion the forces which built out of it humanity and all living things and all the strangely—to us—shaped ancestors of us and all living things. The original difference between organic and inorganic matter, says Gregory in his "The Making of the Earth," p. 228, was perhaps only one of chemical composition. He points out that the earliest forms of life—as we know life—lived under such conditions that only three processes were essential to their existence; *i. e.*, the absorption of material as food and the rejection of the waste products; second, the power of absorbing from food a supply of energy and the power to do work; third, the capacity to con-

of the moth and the shimmering wonder of the mother-of-pearl.

"Is there any greater gap between any of these and the metallic? I think not."

"Not materially," I answered. "No. But there remains—consciousness."

"That," he said, "I cannot understand. Ventnor spoke of—how did he put it—a group consciousness, operating in our sphere and in spheres above and below ours, with senses known and unknown. I got—glimpses—Goodwin, but I cannot understand."

"We have agreed for reasons that seem sufficient to us to call these Things metallic, Dick," I replied. "But that does not necessarily mean that they are composed of any metal that we know. Nevertheless, being metal, they must be of crystalline structure."

"As Gregory has pointed out (see preceding note), crystals and what we call living matter had an equal start in the first essentials of life. We cannot conceive life

without giving it the attribute of some sort of consciousness. Hunger cannot be anything but conscious, and there is no other stimulus to eat but hunger.

"The crystals eat. The extraction of power from food is conscious because it is purposeful, and there can be no purpose without consciousness; similarly the power to work from such derived energy is also purposeful and therefore conscious. The crystals do both. And the crystals can transmit all these abilities to their children, just as we do. For although there would seem to be no reason why they should not continue to grow to gigantic size under favorable conditions—yet they do not. They reach a size beyond which they do not develop."

"Instead, they bud—give birth, in fact—to smaller ones, which increase until they reach the size of the preceding generation. And like the children of man and animals, these younger generations grow on precisely as their progenitors!\*

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tinue the two operations and to transmit the power to do them to the separate parts of the mass after its increase in bulk has rendered division necessary. "All three processes that are essential to the simplest form of living matter are also shared by the crystals," he concludes—p. 227, *Ibid.*

I earnestly wish that three classes of my readers—those who finding it impossible to accept the verity of my narrative are still interested in its probability; those who accepting it desire to know more of the proved scientific factors involved; and those who in doubt of its truth are desirous of satisfying themselves as to the accuracy of its references—would read before going farther with me Chapter XIII of Gregory's "The Making of the Earth," Chapter III of Le Bon's "Evolution of Matter," and Professor Ellsworth Huntington's, of Yale, "World Power and Evolution," chapter "The Voyage of Evolution."

The mysterious force of life once having become a part of any group of matter, once having given it impetus, who shall say where that evolution so begun must cease? The Metal People were crystalline, developments of those crystal forms which, whether they originated on this earth or another, shared, as Gregory puts it, the first three essential processes of living matter. I write this although it is in advance of my narrative, and being so is in the fictional sense an error. But this narrative is not fiction.—W. T. G.

\* Le Bon—I quote again from his "Evolution of Matter," says: "The crystal undergoes like the animal or the plant, a progressive evolution before attaining its final form. Again, like the animal or the plant, the crystal mutilated can repair its mutilation. The crystal in reality is the final stage of a particular form of life."

But I say—who can write "finis" to any form of life?

"During its infancy," Le Bon writes further, "the future crystal behaves like a human being. It represents tissue in course of evolution. It is an organized being undergoing a series of transformation of which the final stage is the crystalline form, as the oak is the final stage of evolution of the acorn. There is hardly in nature anything but the crystal which possesses a truly stable and definite form. The crystal forms a being intermediate between brute and living forms, and placed nearer to the latter than the former. It possesses in common with living beings certain definite qualities and in particular something singularly resembling ancestral life. The crystalline germs we introduce into a solution to crystallize it seem to hint at a whole series of earlier lives. They recall the germs of living beings—that is to say, the spermatozoa which comprise the whole sum of the successive forms of the life of a race, and contain, notwithstanding their insignificant size, all the details of the successive transformations which the living being exhibit before arriving at the adult stage."

"All the facts of this order," concludes Le Bon, "belong to the category of unexplained phenomena of which nature is full, and which become more numerous as soon as we penetrate into unexplored regions."

I must repeat that the Metal People were being made up of myriads of tiny specialized crystals as the living being is made up of myriads of tiny specialized cells.—W. T. G.

"Very well, then—we arrive at the conception of a metallicly crystalline being, which by some explosion of the force of evolution has burst from the to us familiar and apparently inert stage into these Things that hold us! And is there any greater difference between the forms with which we are familiar and them than there is between us and the crawling amphibian which was our remote ancestor? Or between that and the amoeba—the little swimming stomach from which it evolved? Or the amoeba and the inert jelly of the protobion?"

"As for what Ventnor calls a group consciousness I would assume that he means a communal intelligence such as that shown by the bees and the ants—that in the case of the former Maeterlinck calls the "spirit of the Hive." It is shown in their groupings—just as the geometric arrangement of those groupings shows also clearly their crystalline intelligence!

"I submit that in their rapid coordination either for attack or movement or work without any apparent communication having passed between the units, there is nothing more remarkable than in the swarming of a hive of bees where also without apparent communication just so many wax-makers, nurses, honey-gatherers, chemists, bread-makers, cleaners, and all the varied specialists of the hive go with the old queen, leaving behind sufficient number of each class for the needs of the young queen.

"All this apportionment is effected without any means of communication that we recognize. Still it is most obviously intelligent selection. For if it were hap-hazard all the honey-makers might leave and the hive starve, or all the chemists might go and the food for the young bees not be properly prepared—and so on and so on."

"But metal," he muttered, "and conscious. It's all very well—but where did that consciousness come from? And what is it? And where did they come from? And most of all, why haven't they overrun the world before this?"

\* "Such development as theirs, such an evolution, pre-supposes aeons of time—

long as it took us to drag up from the lizards. What have they been doing—why haven't they been ready to strike—if Ventnor's right—at humanity until now?"

"I don't know," I answered helplessly. "But evolution is not the slow, plodding process that Darwin thought. There seem to be explosions—nature will create a new form almost in a night. Then comes the long ages of development and adjustment, and suddenly another new race appears.

"It might be so of these—some extraordinary conditions that shaped them. Or they might have developed through the ages in spaces within the earth—there's that incredible abyss we saw that is evidently one of their highways. Or they might have dropped here upon some fragment of a broken world, found in this valley the right conditions and developed in amazing rapidity.\* They're all possible theories—take your pick."

"Something's held them back—and they're rushing to a climax," he whispered. "Ventnor's right about that—I feel it. And what can we do? What in the devil can we do, Doc?"

"Go back to the city," I said. "Go back as he ordered. I believe he knows what he's talking about. And I believe he'll be able to help us. It wasn't just a request he made, nor even an appeal—it was a command."

"It was more than that." Drake's brows knit into a bar over stern eyes. "More than that. It was the agony of a soul who sees the fate of humanity upon the balance! And if he's right—good God! The fate of humanity is in the balance with only us two to throw the saving weight upon the scales. And what can we do—just two men—against these Things?"

"That we may find out—when we're back in the city," I answered.

"Well," his old reckless cheerfulness came back to him, "in every crisis of this old globe it's been up to one man to turn the trick. \*We're two! And at the worst we can only go down fighting a little before the rest of us. So, after all, whatever the hell, *what the hell!*"

\* Professor Svante Arrhenius's theory of propagation of life by means of minute spores carried through space. See his "Worlds in the Making"—W. T. G.

For a time we were silent.

"Well," he said at last, "we have to go to the city in the morning." He laughed. "Sounds as though we were living in the suburbs somewhere, doesn't it?"

"It can't be many hours before dawn," I said. "Turn in for awhile, Dick; I'll wake you when I think you've slept enough."

"It doesn't seem fair," he protested, but sleepily.

"I'm not sleepy," I told him; nor was I. But whether I was or was not, I wanted to question Yuruk, uninterrupted and undisturbed.

Drake stretched himself out, head bor-

ing about for the softest spot in his saddle-bag. He found it; settled; then blinked at me.

"Sure," he murmured, "that's what I wanted to tell you. Like the electric eel.\* An eel as big as that star Thing that light-ninged Ventnor, and I'll bet its current would be as great or greater. Nothing miraculous in that—electric eels—armidillos—once you spot the thing—nothing to it—we'll show 'em—"

He dropped into slumber, still muttering. When his breathing showed him fast asleep indeed, I slipped over to the black eunuch and crouched, right hand close to the butt of my automatic, facing him.

This story will be continued in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.

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\* *Gymnotus electricus*; its electrical organs are modifications of the lateral muscles supplied with numerous branches from the spinal nerves and extending the whole length of the tail. The posterior end of the organ is positive, the anterior negative. The electric eel attains a length of three feet, and the thickness of a man's thigh. It frequents the marshes of Brazil and the Guianas. I have seen one of these creatures stun, successively, six mules before it could be handled.—W. T. G.



## ON THE DEATH MASK OF NAPOLEON

BY LILLIAN P. WILSON

**H**OW deeply dead you are, Napoleon!

Great Emperor, Little Corporal.

How high, and cold that forehead,

Which once surged with the fires,

Of a million destinies,

And more.

So harmless now.

How direct, austere, that slender nose,

Which in its day

Made sovereigns tremble,

With its mere dilation.

The mouth, how firm,

Set in the manner of a new campaign.

The chin determined.

To what end?

The cheeks, how hollow,

And the eyes, like sunken graves.

As if Napoleon you had tried,

To drag the Earth, in death with you.

As a child in moving,

Carries all the way, his favorite toy.

Sire, I pity you—

Now—that I may.

You who scorned the world's compassion.

What a strange peace

Has settled in your sunken eyes.

Like sleep,

Sleep of a babe, at its mother's breast,

Sleep of Gods,

Reposing, since the birth of time.

Sleep we cannot understand!

And so we call it death.

Because it tricks us.

Because without a sign, a sound,

It drops its playthings

To immortal depths,

As we let trinkets sink into the sea,

At night.

Ah, Napoleon, those eyes are too quiet!

That mouth too set

To be subdued.

Still are you marching on to victory,

Content that greater battles are ahead,

Little Corporal of the Dead.

# How Many Cards?

by Isabel Ostrander

Author of "Ashes to Ashes," "Twenty-Six Cues," "Suspense," etc.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### WOMAN FOR WOMAN.

"WHO are you?" The inspector turned to the huddled figure in the corner.

"Ada Hopkins." The hand holding the handkerchief fell to her lap disclosing a small, pinched, delicately withered face. "I'm a seamstress, out by the day, and I have the flat under Mrs. Hildreth's—Mrs. Hill's, I mean. I got sick and she took care of me like an angel; nobody ever did anything for me before in all my life! I knew she was sad and in some kind of trouble, but she never told me about it and I didn't like to ask; if I didn't mind my own business I never could have kept my customers for twenty years, going from house to house—"

"Come, come!" the inspector interrupted. "Get down to cases, Miss Hopkins. So you hid this woman when we were after her the other night, did you?"

"Yes, sir, and I'd do it again!" The little creature flared up suddenly. "She never laid a finger on anybody's jewelry, and as for accusing Mr. Hill of shooting that man—why, he was home from a little past eleven o'clock Thursday night until nearly three in the morning! That's what I've come down here to tell you and I don't care what you do to me for helping Mrs. Hill!"

"So you knew she had skipped her bail, did you?" asked the inspector.

"Not till Friday night, but it wouldn't have made any difference to me; she was no thief, no matter what that rich family said about her! I'm working extra, nights, making a wedding-dress for one of the girls in the neighborhood and I ran out of white silk thread on Thursday night. I went around to a little shop on Third Avenue that I knew kept open late to get some more, and when I came back I met Mr. Hill in the vestibule and we talked real pleasantly all the way up-stairs."

"What time was this?"

"Twenty minutes after eleven by the clock on my mantel when I got back into my rooms," Miss Hopkins responded promptly. "I know, because I looked particular; I was timing myself on that dress and I knew I'd have to work until near morning. The floors and ceilings in that Lanahan house are as thin as paper and I heard Mr. Hill go into his flat and the sound of their voices talking for hours while he tramped back and forth, shaking my chandelier. I was sewing away so hard that I never realized how late it was getting till I heard him go out again. It surprised me and I looked at the time to find it was five minutes to three. I put away my sewing then and went to bed."

There was a pause, during which the inspector's eyes slowly met those of McCarty

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for July 24.



and what he read there brought a slight flush to his cheek.

"You are prepared to swear that Hill was in his rooms all during the time you mention?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know that the man who is charged with the murder of Eugene Creveling is the same man you knew first as Hildreth and then as Hill?" persisted the inspector.

"From the pictures of him that was printed in last night's papers, and this morning's, too; I'd swear to him anywhere," she retorted with spirit.

"What happened Friday night?"

"Well, I was busy putting sleeves in that dress, sir, when along between twelve and one I heard a sound like people going upstairs past my door real soft, but I didn't think anything of it. I heard some one groaning, too, but I wouldn't open my door; I never want to get into any neighbor's rows! Then Mrs. Hildreth's door slammed and I heard her running toward the kitchen; and she ain't what you might call light-footed!

"I dropped my needle and listened then, and I heard a terrible noise all at once; the crash of her door coming down and a lot of pottery breaking. Something hit my kitchen window and I ran in there just in time to see Mrs. Hildreth come down the fire-escape. She begged me to hide her, and said it was the police, but she hadn't done any wrong and she could explain. That was enough for me, and I hid her, all right!" A little mischievous twinkle came into Miss Hopkins's reddened eyes. "The policeman and your own smart young detective walked all round her and never saw her!"

"What do you mean?" Inspector Druet demanded.

"I made a dummy of her!" she replied with evident satisfaction. "There wasn't a place you could hide a cat in my rooms, and I was at my wit's end, when all at once I thought of the form—the figure, you know, that I drape dresses on. Quick as a wink I whipped that wedding-dress off it, dragged it over and stuck it in the closet and made Hildreth stand straight up on the

skirt-measuring platform. I don't know how I ever got that wedding-dress on her, for it was an awful tight fit, her being so big, but I managed it somehow, pulling the skirt down over her feet and throwing a sheet over the top of her like I always do over dresses on the form to keep them clean. When the policeman and your detective come through my rooms I was sitting on the floor, stitching away at the hem of that skirt and they never so much as lifted a corner of the sheet!"

McCarty coughed, but the inspector avoided his eye and asked hastily:

"What happened after they had gone?"

"Nothing. Mrs. Hildreth came down off the platform and told me who she was and the story she's come here to tell you now and nobody knew she was in my rooms until now. Ever since she read in the papers yesterday afternoon that her husband had been arrested for that murder she was near crazy, and this morning she couldn't stand it any longer, for she knew he would never speak and give away where she was; he'd go to the chair first. She made up her mind to come down here to you and give herself up, and nothing could stop her."

"Is this all true?" The inspector turned once more to the woman before him. "Are you the wife of Frank Hill?"

"Yes, sir; I have brought with me my marriage-certificate. It is most certainly true that my husband was at home with me at the time the murder was committed and true also that I did not touch the jewels of Mrs. Creveling. I told all that I knew about that when I was first arrested, but what I suspect—" She shrugged. "Who would believe?"

"We'll listen to you, all right," the inspector promised. "Sit down and tell me everything. You are Swedish and called yourself Ilsa Helwig, didn't you, when you went to work at the Crevelings?"

"Yes, sir, it is my name. I am of German parents, but always I have lived in Stockholm. In October I went as housemaid to the Crevelings, and in January I married Frank." She paused and then added: "I have so many times before told my story of what happened the afternoon the

emeralds disappeared, but perhaps you do not know. As Mrs. Creveling testified, I was summoned to help her dress for the pageant and had unpacked her costume when she came into the room with the jewel-case in her hand. She put it down upon her dressing-table and then Rollins came to say that some one wanted her on the telephone. I had all day such a headache I was nearly crazy and I thought I would have time to slip away to my room and take a powder before Mrs. Creveling returned. I did go up to my room, sir, not down-stairs as Mr. Creveling swore; I did not touch the jewel-case. But who would believe?"

"Did you go directly back to Mrs. Creveling's dressing-room after you took your medicine?"

"Yes, but she had already returned, sir. No one was more surprised than I when she opened the jewel-case and it was empty, but I—I never thought that I should be accused. I—it stunned me, I was for a time like one dead, and then I began to think, and so did Frank."

She paused once more and the inspector said impatiently.

"Well, what did you think?"

"Mr. Creveling is dead, sir, and it is not well to speak against those who are gone, but why should he have sworn to a lie about me?" the woman asked simply. "Why did he try to fasten on me the theft instead of doing all he could to find out who really took the emeralds unless he knew the truth and must hide it, no matter who suffered? Yet he could not have been all bad, that man, for who sent to my lawyers the money for my bond?"

The inspector bent forward over his desk.

"You think that Creveling took his wife's emeralds?" he cried. "Will you swear that neither you nor your husband have any idea where the ten thousands came from for your bail?"

"I swear it, sir! It happened exactly as my lawyers told. Frank and I had suspected from the time Mr. Creveling said that which was not true about me, and he did not want me prosecuted from the beginning, you know. That was Mrs. Creveling's doing; she is of ice, that lady. Ice

and iron! But it does not matter about me. I can prove nothing against Mrs. Creveling and she must do with me as she wishes. You have heard my good friend here; her word has cleared my husband of the murder charge, has it not? Oh, will you set him free?"

The inspector sent for Martin and despatched him with a note to the commissioner. Then for the first time he addressed McCarty.

"What do you think, Mac?"

McCarty cast a warning glance toward the two women who were conversing together in the corner and replied in low, quick tones:

"I'm thinking I'd like to go to the Tombs with the paper that lets Hill out and have a talk with him."

An hour later, as he made his way over to the gloomy, turreted pile of gray stone, McCarty went carefully in retrospection through the account of the theft which Mrs. Creveling had given him. That she herself had conspired with her husband to make away with her own jewels and place the blame upon the girl was unthinkable, but that Creveling might have abstracted them from the jewel-case in the temporary absence of both mistress and maid was another matter. If the woman was to be believed, there was no one else to whom suspicion could be directed, for all the other servants of the household were together down-stairs—except the maid who was ill—and they could easily prove an alibi for each other.

Creveling could have taken the jewels while they were in his safe, of course, but in that case no one else could be definitely accused. If Creveling had seen Ilsa slip away after her mistress' departure he might have seized upon the psychological moment to dart across the hall and possess himself of the emeralds, confident if he considered it at all that when they were not found in the maid's hands his wife would not press a charge against her. Mrs. Creveling herself had admitted that he did not want to prosecute the girl and then there was the matter of the cash bail; ten thousand does not drop from the skies!

But surely, in spite of his partner's state-

ment as to the shrinkage of his capital, Creveling could not have been brought so low financially that he must steal his own wife's trinkets. Then a sudden thought halted McCarty in the middle of a busy street, to the imminent danger of his neck and the wrath of the traffic policeman. Urged to action by the honk of a motor-born just behind his ear he sprang mechanically for the curb and continued his way as though in a daze.

Creveling had opened the jewel-case when he took it from the safe to give it to his wife and she had mentioned that she intended to have the stones reset almost immediately, but he had tried to dissuade her from doing so. Had his disapproval been merely because their antique setting appealed to his artistic sense, as Mrs. Creveling said, or had he another reason? Were the stones in those old settings the same ones which she had placed in his charge only a few days before?

There was another problem, too, in McCarty's mind, which bore more directly on the murder, but he thrust it for the moment aside. He had felt from the start of the investigation that Hill held a possible key to the mystery if only he could be persuaded to speak; would he break silence now if he might thereby save his wife from going to trial?

When the former valet was ushered into his presence at the Tombs McCarty beamed at him in a guileless, friendly manner.

"Hello, Hill," he began genially. "I guess you knew we couldn't hang that murder charge on you for long, didn't you? And that's why you acted so unconcerned."

The man's face was drawn and haggard and he raised burning eyes to meet the clear blue ones which smiled at him.

"What does that matter?" he asked listlessly. "You've found her—"

"I did, but she got away from me Friday night," McCarty said frankly.

"Got away!" Hill clutched suddenly at a chair as if for support.

"She's down at headquarters now; that Hopkins woman on the floor below you has been taking care of her, but she gave herself up when she heard that you were charged with Creveling's murder, so that she

could prove your alibi. Here! Buck up, man!"

With a groan Hill sunk into a chair and covered his face with his thin hands.

"That's why you took me up!" he said. "You did it to make her show herself! Oh, why did she do it! Couldn't she realize that I would rather have anything happen to me than that she should be caught!"

"'Twas the very best thing that she could have done!" McCarty asserted stoutly. "We'd have got her sooner or later and what with her jumping her bail and all it might have looked pretty black against her, but now since she's come clean, Hill, I don't mind telling you that if your wife's story is straight I'm going to back her up. I'm going to see what Creveling himself might have had to do with the stealing of those emeralds!"

For an instant Hill looked up with a gleam of hope in his eyes. Then they darkened sullenly and he shook his head.

"It's only another trick!" he muttered. "Why would any one think that Mr. Creveling would take his wife's jewels? We'd have had no chance to convince people without proof, and Ilsa had better have kept quiet; it'll only go harder with her."

"'Tis no trick!" McCarty protested. "I know that Creveling needed money bad and those stones were worth thirty thousand—"

"Money?" Hill interrupted him in surprise. "Why, we thought he had given them to another—"

He stopped with his lips pressed tightly together, but McCarty finished the sentence for him.

"To another woman, do you mean? Hill, I'm speaking the God's truth when I tell you that if you'll come across with all you know about Creveling I'll do my best to clear your wife of the charge against her and get the indictment squashed. That can only be done by finding the stones or proving who took them and what became of them. I'm willing to say right now that I don't think your wife is guilty, but you'll have to help me prove it. Will you?"

Once more Hill's haggard eyes studied his face and after a long minute he drew a deep breath and straightened in his chair.

"Yes, sir," he said. "I believe you now,

and if you'll only get her free I'll tell you everything I know about Eugene Creveling!"

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE LETTER.

"I'VE found out quite a lot about Mr. Creveling, as it is," McCarty spoke a trifle grimly. "You told me, Hill, that he'd never touched a card in years, for one thing, but I've learned different."

"You mean those games at Mr. Cutter's, sir?" Hill paused. "Mr. Creveling was always great for gambling, from the old, wild days when I first came to him before he was married. He'd bet a small fortune on anything, but cards were always a passion with him. He used to run terrific games himself in that study where you found him dead; that's why he had that high wall built at the back of the house. One of the neighbors on the side street who was trying to get into society and whom Mrs. Creveling had snubbed, could look into the study from her rear windows and she got the police there in her house and tried to have the Crevelings raided one night. I must say it looked like a professional gambling-establishment, at that, but Mr. Creveling being so well known he was tipped off and it cost him a mint of money to hush the matter up without scandal that would have reached Mrs. Creveling's ears. She didn't know about the games then, sir."

"She plays now herself," commented McCarty.

"All their set do, at Mr. Cutter's. When Mr. Creveling got intimate with him he stopped having games at his own house and their crowd got to meeting regular at Mr. Cutter's, him being a bachelor and master of his own house."

"And a professional gambler at that. Did you know that, Hill?"

"I suspected as much, sir, and more. I've heard whispers that the games weren't altogether straight, and that Mr. Creveling and—and one of the other gentlemen knew as much." Hill hesitated. "Butlers and valets and ladies' maids see more than their employers ever stop to think about,

and I watched people come and go in their crowd, and they all ended the same; they'd come with a fortune and maybe a beautiful wife that wasn't known as well as she'd like to be in society here, and they'd lose a little and be allowed to win it back, piecemeal, with some more besides, and meantime the wife was being taken up and made much of, and soon they'd be living beyond their income, whatever it was, trying to keep up with the procession.

"Then he'd plunge and lose more and win back more yet, and so they'd play him until he risked everything and lost, and that time there'd be no come-back. Of course, he'd think they were bully good fellows until the showdown, and she'd think she was having the time of her life and getting in with the real people. I've seen all sides of it, sir, and said nothing until now, but if some of the married men only realized the dangers they were exposing their wives to in letting them further their social advancement so—so permiscuous like, with people they really don't know anything about, they'd think twice before they got in with a set of so-called gentlemen gamblers. Mr. Ford was one of the latest that got stung, I hear—but it was Mr. Creveling you wanted me to tell you about!"

"And more than his gambling," McCarty remarked. "I've heard talk of his affairs with women, and of a quarrel with Mr. Waverly not more than a fortnight ago. What do you know about it?"

"Only what the butler, Rollins, told me, sir, and that's not much. Of course, before Mr. Creveling married it was just one affair after another, and what with breach of promise and divorce suits threatened or pending, it was a miracle he wasn't shot long ago," Hill said frankly. "I never saw him fall so hard, though, as he did for Miss Alexander, and when they were married I thought he'd settle down; he didn't, for long, but he's been so cautious and discreet that even I couldn't get a line on him. I suppose you think it was funny that I stayed on with him after they'd prosecuted my wife for stealing those jewels, but I had a purpose, sir. She was innocent, but they'd done her a dirty trick, and I meant to fight him the same way, if I could. You

see, I'm giving it to you straight. I stayed to get something on him that I could hold over him and make him either produce those emeralds if he'd taken them himself as we both thought, or else have my wife set free. He had influence enough to do it even after she was indicted if he had wanted to, and I meant to make him want to worse than he had ever wanted anything in his life before!

"Call it blackmail if you like, sir; my wife was facing prison for something she had never done, and I was near crazed with the thought of it. Of course, I would have been dismissed or maybe arrested, too, if they had known that Ilsa and I were man and wife, but we had meant from the start to keep it a secret until spring, and then leave and get a little place in the country. I've got quite a bit put by, and we were going to open a sort of little tea-place for motorists—"

His voice broke, and for a minute he seemed on the point of breaking down, but McCarty waited without speaking, and finally he gathered himself together and went on:

"I knew even before Rollins told me of the words he had had with Mr. Waverly that Mr. Creveling had what you might call another affair on; I haven't been with him all these years without learning his moods, and I took it that he wasn't receiving any too much encouragement. He was ugly for weeks past, and there was no pleasing him, but all at once he changed and began to act as if he owned the earth. Whoever the—*the lady was*, he must have had reason to think she'd begun to like him."

"Then you don't know who it was?" McCarty asked bluntly. "This is no time for us to be quibbling about names, Hill; he didn't stop at blackening your wife's. You didn't find out?"

Hill shook his head.

"Then what makes you sure that it was a—a real lady?" McCarty chose his words now with evident care.

"Because he was so extra cautious and secretive. You'd think after all the years I've been with him he would have trusted me a little or made some break that would

have given me a line on him, but not he! That's why I knew it must be some one with position; some one in his own set, maybe. It was news to me that Mr. Waverly was jealous, as he must have been from what Rollins overheard. I—I'm quite sure that Mrs. Waverly was not the lady alluded to in that quarrel."

"How did your wife come to jump her bail, Hill?" McCarty asked with seeming irrelevance.

"Well, we talked it over, sir, and it didn't seem that there was a chance for her if she went to trial, so there wasn't anything else to be done. We both hated the thought of it, for it looked like a confession of guilt, but we couldn't either of us face the worse thought of her going to prison. It's no harm to tell you now, for she's safe out of the country, but there was one that was in our confidence and helped us plan the whole thing, even to furnishing up that little flat all ready for us, and that was Mrs. Jarvie, the Crevelings' housekeeper, sir. She'd engaged Ilsa in the beginning, you know, and she thought the world of her, and never believed for a minute that she took those jewels, bless her!

"Ilsa's trial was set for about a month ago, and when she couldn't be found Mrs. Creveling shut up the house except for Rollins, and Sarah, and me, and went off to Long Island. I thought that with her out of the way Mr. Creveling would maybe show his hand, and I stuck to him closer than ever, but he didn't, and I was beginning to get desperate! It wasn't till last Thursday morning that I found something out about him—something that wasn't at all what I thought it would be; but it was enough to bring him to terms, for all that. He was working the same sort of thing on somebody else that I was trying to do to him."

"What do you mean?" McCarty stared.

"Blackmail, if you choose to call it that; anyway, he was holding something over somebody else's head. He came to the house about ten in the morning from his club, and after changing his clothes he went to the telephone and called up Mazzarini, the caterer, and ordered a supper

for two sent there that night. I was going through his suit before hanging it up when I found a note in one of the pockets and I read it, sir. The top part was in his own handwriting, and it began without any name, so I couldn't tell who it was for; but the meaning was plain enough. It was a command for some one to come there that night and talk things over, and although it was worded politely enough, there was a threat between every line if you had eyes to see it! He had signed it with just one initial—'C.'—and the person who got it had written seven words underneath and sent it back to him."

"What were those seven words?" demanded McCarty.

"I accept. Expect me half past twelve," Hill quoted slowly. "I didn't know the writing, and there wasn't even an initial signed to the answer; but I stuck it in my pocket quick. I'd heard him tell Rollins and Sarah that they could clear out until next day, and I thought that meant that I was to serve the supper, and my time had come at last! He said he expected a gentleman guest for supper, and ordered me to wait at the house and arrange the table and take the stuff from the caterer's men, and then bring a freshly pressed Tuxedo to the club at eleven o'clock. I did, thinking, of course, that I was to return, and I could have cursed him to his face when he told me I needn't show up until the next day.

"I went home to the little flat where Ilsa was hiding, and we talked it over. The note that I'd kept was enough if it was handled right to make him clear Ilsa's name by bluffing his wife some way and giving out that the jewels were found even if he couldn't produce them; but if I knew who the man was that was coming, I'd have Creveling so he couldn't even squirm. He had put through more than one shady business transaction at those little midnight suppers of his before, and I knew this must be nearer blackmail than the others if he wouldn't have one of us there even to serve the supper. It meant I'd be discharged if he caught me in the house when he'd told me to stay away, but I made up my mind at last to go back and

risk it. It was almost three o'clock, but usually those conferences were all-night affairs, and I hoped to get just one look at his guest without being seen.

"The house was all lighted up, but I didn't think anything of that, and let myself in with my own key at the tradesmen's entrance. I kept as quiet as I could for fear Mr. Creveling should discover me, and it was well for me that I did, for I heard heavy footsteps and men's voices in the kitchen, and I had barely time to dodge into the scullery when they came out and started down to the cellar; a policeman that I recognized as the one on night duty around that beat, and two men in plain clothes.

"I turned cold, for it came to me right away that something had happened to Mr. Creveling, and the letter I'd found might be of no use in freeing Ilsa, after all! As soon as they had gone down the cellar steps I hurried around to the main hall and looked into the breakfast-room and then the study. There lay Mr. Creveling, dead!"

"Hill," McCarty interrupted the story, "did that gun beside him belong to Mr. Creveling?"

The valet shook his head.

"I never saw it before, sir, and I didn't notice it particularly then. I was staring down at him, and I almost went crazy for a moment, thinking of Ilsa, and that her last chance had gone!"

"What did you do then?" McCarty asked. "Think carefully, Hill. Did you touch anything in the room? Did you see any playing-cards or anything lying around?"

"I don't have to think!" the other responded. "I'll never forget that scene as long as I live! I didn't see any playing-cards or anything except just Mr. Creveling's body, and I wouldn't have soiled my hands by touching it for the world! I don't know how long I stood there with my brain whirling, but it couldn't have been more than a minute or two, and then I began to think fast. I saw I had two strings left to my bow, after all. One was to find the man that had been there and shot Creveling and hold what I knew over

his head to make him help me, as he could have if he knew Mrs. Creveling and had any influence with her; the other was to get Mrs. Creveling and her uncle there together as quick as I could and offer to hush things up if they'd set Ilsa free. I knew that she'd stopped caring for her husband long ago—hated him, in fact—and I thought she would want to prevent scandal and notoriety before anything else, just as Mr. Alexander would. He would be glad enough that Creveling was out of the way so he could handle the estate to suit himself."

"You didn't stop to think that it might have been suicide?"

Hill laughed shortly.

"Not knowing Mr. Creveling the way I did! He wouldn't have had the—the guts to do it, sir! It takes long to tell it, but I just thought it all out in a flash. I could only find out who had been there that night by tracing the writing at the bottom of that note, and I knew Mr. Creveling kept a lot of private letters in that secret drawer in his desk. Of course I'd been through it often enough before, having watched when he didn't know it to see how he worked the spring; but some of the letters were from gentlemen whose names were strange to me, and I hadn't taken notice of the writing.

"Then I remembered that there would be a thorough search made for clues all over the house, and it came to me—what if Mrs. Jarvie had left a stray letter or memorandum or something in her desk that would show where Ilsa was hiding? She was an old lady, and though close-mouthed was given to scribbling notes and diaries and such. I supposed, of course, that the policeman and the other two were the only living men in the house besides myself, and I started up-stairs, when all of a sudden you and the inspector came out of Mr. Creveling's room. I sprang back quick or you would have seen me. When you had gone on to the next floor I slipped into Mr. Creveling's room, put on a pair of his gloves so that my finger-marks wouldn't show, and opening the little drawer I took out the letters.

"I hoped against hope that I could

sneak into the housekeeper's room before you got around to it in your search, but you nearly caught me on the stairs a second time, and I had to wait until you had gone down again. I knew that she used to hide the spare key to her desk behind a loose brick up in the fireplace, and chanced that she had forgotten and left it there, which she had done. Her old household account books were in the desk, together with a stack of loose papers, and I had to take the lot, for I had no time to sort them out. I don't know how I ever got out of the house without being seen, but I heard you-all talking in the room where Mr. Creveling's body was lying, and I slipped out and made for home, where Ilsa was.

"She looked over the housekeeper's books and papers, and sure enough, there were the receipts for some of the furniture of our little flat that I'd given Mrs. Jarvie the money to pay for, with the address scribbled on it to where the stuff was to be delivered, so Ilsa burned the lot. I read over the notes I had taken from Mr. Creveling's desk and compared them with those seven words written at the bottom of his letter. None of them were in the same hand, but I kept two or three for Mrs. Creveling to buy Ilsa's freedom; they showed plain that Mr. Creveling had been threatening people to make them pay up card debts or lend him money, and if they ever got in the newspapers she wouldn't have been able to hold up her head again. It seems rotten to fight a woman like that, maybe, sir, but she hadn't spared Ilsa!

"When I'd destroyed the letters that didn't mean anything to me, I put the rest in my pocket, together with that one I had taken from Mr. Creveling's clothes in the morning, and went to the corner drug-store and called up Mr. Alexander; I altered my voice so he wouldn't recognize it, and you know what I told him. Then I went straight back to the Creveling house and hid those letters. I heard Mr. Alexander come in, and then I knocked on the door of the breakfast-room."

"Who telephoned out to Broadmead? It was your wife, wasn't it?" asked McCarty.

"Yes. I told her to give the message to

a servant, and to pretend that she was the Crevelings' cook. You know the rest, sir. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I saw the way Mrs. Creveling took the news, and how possessed she was to find out who had shot her husband; but I might have known she would be that way, she was so set on punishing Ilsa. I haven't found out yet who the man was that had supper with Mr. Creveling and then killed him, but I've still those letters to hold over Mrs. Creveling's head, only now it won't be any use."

"Nor any need, I hope," McCarty remarked. "Where did you hide those letters, Hill?"

The valet hesitated for a fraction of a second, and then threw out his hands in a gesture of surrender.

"In a niche in the upper hall near Mr. Creveling's door there's a teakwood stand with one of those queer Chinese vases on it that he was always so crazy about. Lift off the vase, sir, and you'll see that the little marble slab that's set in the top of the stand is loose; the letters are under that."

"Well," McCarty rose. "I'm going now to see about getting you out of here and over to headquarters where your wife is waiting to see you. We'll have to hold her—you understand that, of course, for she wouldn't be admitted to bail again even if it should drop from the skies a second time; but the inspector will see that things are made as easy as possible for her, and we'll do all we can to have her trial put off. I won't go back on my promise, Hill. I'm going to do my best to dig up some evidence that will kill that indictment."

An hour later he presented himself at the Creveling house, and his eyes twinkled at the austerity of Rollins's bow.

"If you wish to see Mrs. Creveling, sir, the doctor says that she is not to be disturbed, even by the police," that worthy announced with dignity. "'E says 'e'll be responsible to the authorities, sir."

"That's all right. I didn't come to see her," McCarty responded, adding slyly: "Surprised you, didn't it, Rollins, that arrest we made yesterday?"

"I am not surprised at anything the police does, sir," Rollins remarked. "From

the way this case 'as been 'andled, it wouldn't amaze me if Sarah or me was to be took up next!"

McCarty chuckled.

"Then you don't think that Hill shot Mr. Creveling? No more do I, but orders are orders! Is Mr. Alexander here?"

"Not yet, sir." Rollins unbent a trifle. "'E telephoned that 'e would be 'ere in an hour, and 'e must consult with Mrs. Creveling; 'e wouldn't take no for an answer."

The butler hesitated somewhat uncertainly and McCarty asked:

"Did he say what he wanted to see her about, Rollins?"

"Well, sir, 'e did mention something about that other gentleman that was called in; Mr. Terhune. 'E was so excited that I couldn't rightly make out what 'e meant, but 'is language to me was most unusual; shocking, I'd call it, in a man of 'is years! I gathered that 'e didn't regard Mr. Terhune very 'ighly, and wanted 'im off the case."

McCarty nodded appreciatively.

"I shouldn't wonder. I'll wait here for Mr. Alexander." He seated himself in the nearest chair, and ostentatiously pulling a newspaper from his coat pocket, he spread its ample pages before him. Then as the butler still lingered, he added: "Don't let me be keeping you from your work, Rollins."

The other opened his lips to speak, but thought better of it, and with a nod retired to the pantry. McCarty waited for a few moments, then tossed his paper aside and crossing the hall with noiseless tread he gently closed the door through which Rollins had passed, and turning, crept up the main stairway.

There in the hall by Creveling's door, upon its stand of carved black wood, stood a squat, bulging vase upon which a grotesque dragon in dull red and gold appeared to be endlessly chasing his own tail. From behind the closed door leading to Mrs. Creveling's apartments across the hall came the murmur of feminine voices, and McCarty wasted no time in admiration of the specimen of ancient art. Unceremoniously lifting the vase off the stand he placed it on the rug and examined the



small circular inset of pinkish marble upon which it had rested. It moved slightly beneath his fingers, and pulling out his pen-knife he pried up one edge. There, in a shallow recess beneath, lay a thin packet of letters held together by a rubber band.

Two minutes later the vase was back in its accustomed place, and McCarty, with an expression upon his countenance not unlike that supposed to have been worn by the celebrated cat that ate the canary, was letting himself silently out the front door.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### THE NAME IN THE BOOK.

"IT'S a pity you could not have stopped by for me on your way down to headquarters, the day!" Dennis observed reproachfully as late that afternoon he stretched out his lanky form in McCarty's comfortable delapidated armchair. "Well you knew I was off duty until six this evening, and then on solid for twenty-four hours! I'd have liked first rate to have seen Martin's face when he found how the dressmaker had tricked him with the Hill woman inside that wedding gown instead of the dummy!"

"I only went down to report to the inspector, not thinking Mrs. Hill would show up so soon," McCarty explained. "But what do you think of those letters I found where Hill had hid them under the vase?"

He had recounted to his companion the tale of the morning's adventures, and of all that he had learned about Cutter's establishment and those who frequented it, ending with his visit to the Creveling house and spread the letters out on the desk before him.

"I'm thinking," Dennis observed, "that our fine gentleman, Mr. Creveling, was a crook and a blackguard, and he must have been flirting with that bullet a good while before it finally got him; but all this don't lead you any nearer to who fired it, Mac. You've enough to do finding him without chasing after those emeralds, too."

"I've given my word," McCarty responded soberly. "Hill is the sly fox, but that galoot of a wife of his, for all she's a

fine figure of a woman, is too stupid to be anything but honest, and if Creveling framed her it's up to me to get her off. As for the shooting, I've my own ideas about that, and I'm not springing them on even you, yet, Denny. What do you make of the handwriting of those seven words that were added at the bottom of Creveling's letter and sent back to him?"

"If I was Terhune, now, with his little magnifying glasses, I might be able to tell you the color of the guy's hair that wrote it, and the maiden name of both his grandmothers; but being as I'm not, it's little I make of it at all!" Dennis regarded the double sheet of note-paper critically. "I'd never say, though, that he was the lad to send a bullet through the heart of anybody, for all the letters are kind of bold and dashing. See the way that one straggles and this bit of a blot where the ink dropped off the end of the pen? The hand that held the pen was shaking, Mac, but the one that held the gun didn't."

"True for you." McCarty folded the letters thoughtfully and put them in his pocket. "But it may have been the same hand for all that. It could have shook from excitement or anger beforehand, yet been steady enough when the time came to act. But I've more to tell you, Denny: there are so many loose ends to this case that I made up my mind I'd give this day to pulling out of the tangle, and one of them led straight back here, under this very roof!"

"Here?" Dennis glanced around him at the shabby, homelike room as though he expected something sinister to rear its head in the familiar surroundings.

"To the musty old shop of the little Frenchman down-stairs." McCarty went on: "Do you mind I told you that when I had the interview with Mrs. Kip on Friday I had a kind of an idea I couldn't shake off that I'd seen her before, and not so long ago at that? I could not place her, and it's been bothering me till this afternoon when I went to see her again. While I was waiting for her to come down I looked around the reception-room a bit, and what did I see but an old cabinet with long-legged birds carved on it and lettering

like a laundry ticket in one corner, and I knew it as well as I know the chair you're sitting in this minute, Denny; many's the time I saw it in old Girard's shop below when I went in to have a bit of a smoke with him of an evening, and he told me there was not another like it in the country.

"Then all at once it come to me that 'twas there I'd seen her on a night not a month ago, and I called to mind that there had been a man in a big fur coat with her, and a car outside. I did not get sight of his face, but the car was a long, low, open runabout, with an engine like a racer, and I recalled thinking how unseasonable it was with the snow and all. I remembered her, too, because she was dressed so funny; a little hat with a long veil and a heavy enough motoring coat; but the coat was open, and underneath it she had on an evening dress you could have made from a lace handkerchief and had some to spare.

"Did you ask Girard if he knew who the fellow was?" asked Dennis eagerly.

"He's gone away for the day, but I'll see him to-night," McCarty responded. "By the time Mrs. Kip had made up her mind she'd see me this afternoon, I'd worked up an interest in antiques and Chink cabinets in particular, that would have done credit to Girard himself. The first thing I asked her was where that one had come from, and she said a friend had brought it to her straight from the Orient; that was answer enough for me to get it that she was afraid to drag in that man with the fur coat. I gave it to her strong then that I knew she'd lied about her whereabouts on Thursday night at the time Creveling was killed."

"And what happened?" Dennis sat bolt upright in his chair. "Did she come across with the truth? Where—"

"She did not!" McCarty interrupted grimly. "I've seen many a woman in a temper, but never the beat of her! The half of it was put on; I could see that, for in the midst of her hysterics she was studying me with an eye as cold as a fish to see how I was taking it, and if she was stalling me any. She's a born gambler, that Mrs. Kip, but she hasn't learned when to bluff

and when to lay down her cards. She stuck to it that she'd gone to bed early, and her maid could prove it, and that 'twas the day before that she'd fallen on the rug and hurt her arm."

"And what did the maid say?" demanded Dennis.

McCarty shrugged.

"What would any girl say that had a soft berth and was afraid of losing it?" he retorted. "The minute Mrs. Kip called her in I could see she had her story all fixed and 'twas a waste of time to even listen to it. When she'd left the room I remarked to Mrs. Kip that I supposed her companion, Miss Frost, would corroborate it, and when she said yes, I asked her to write out the address in Chicago that Miss Frost had gone to."

"And what was the good of that when you knew all the time that Miss Frost was no more in Chicago than we are?"

For answer McCarty pulled a folded slip of paper from his pocket.

"To get a look at her handwriting."

Dennis's eyes bulged.

"Mac, you don't think 'twas a woman?"

"I'm no expert, and those seven words might have been written by a woman," McCarty replied guardedly.

"And some man kept the appointment for her!" Dennis finished. "Let's have a look at that slip."

McCarty passed it over and his companion scrutinized it doubtfully.

"It might be the same at that," he said at last as he returned it. "Especially if the writing at the bottom of Creveling's note was disguised a bit, as it likely was, seeing that not even an initial was signed to it. Did you get any answer to that advertisement you put in the papers about Mrs. Kip's fur neck-piece?"

"Not up to yesterday afternoon when I called at the *Bulletin* office," McCarty rose. "It's half past five. Come and I'll have an early bite with you before you go back on duty, for no lunch did I have, and I'm going to drop in at the O'Rourkes' and come home after to talk to Girard."

"The O'Rourkes, is it?" Dennis asked as he reached for his hat. "The high society you're moving in these days."

"I knew them in the old country when she was a baby and he just a broth of a boy, as I'm after telling you," McCarty remarked. "If there's a drop of the old blood in him, Cutter and his crowd will strip him of his last cent, and him thinking all the time that the game is a straight one and them as clean sports as he. I'd not butt in now but they may scent scandal and exposure coming and make a killing off him before they beat it. I've an idea that Waverly is four-flushing financially just the way Creveling was, and is in on a percentage of Cutter's games. Anyway, I'll not let the O'Rourke be stung if a word in his ear will save him!"

But when McCarty stood in the genial, democratic presence of John Cavanaugh O'Rourke, he did not find it so easy to utter that saving word. Adroitly he turned the conversation from the mystery of Creveling's death to a discussion of his friends and heard a eulogy of Nicholas Cutter which left him at a loss as to how to proceed upon his mission. After all, the O'Rourke was a gentleman, and McCarty had been but a gawky, out-at-elbows lout, bred of the farms and byres. Would the former listen to a word from such a source against one who, though a scamp and a scoundrel, was nevertheless of aristocratic stock? The ex-roundsman drew a deep breath and plunged.

"You were good enough when I talked with you last, sir, to say I should let you know if there was any way you could help to clear up the matter of Mr. Creveling's death. Will you answer me one question, not to be repeated to the inspector, but as man to man?"

"Of course, Timmie." The old name came instinctively to O'Rourke's lips. "If this valet, Hill, whom you have arrested—"

"Hill has been let go again. We took him in on the murder charge for another purpose entirely, and it worked." McCarty paused. "The question I wanted to ask you was about Mr. Cutter. I know he's of a fine old family, and you think he is a friend of yours—"

"Think?" O'Rourke caught him up quickly. "He's the best pal in the world."

"So a lot more have thought, sir, until they left his card-table with nothing but the clothes they stood in." McCarty met with a steady gaze the fire which flashed suddenly in the other's eyes. "I know all about those little games of his, you see, and I suppose you'll be ready to kick me out, but 'tis only because of the old days I'm speaking now. Did it ever occur to you, sir, that they were being run crooked?"

For a moment it seemed that O'Rourke's anger would burst forth, but he turned away instead with a forced laugh.

"You're away off, Timmie! Nick Cutter is a thorough sportsman all the way through, and his play is dead on the level. Of course he wouldn't care to have it published broadcast that a few of his intimate friends meet as a regular thing at his house for a gentlemen's game, because of the beastly notoriety and your ubiquitous police system over here; he might actually be raided! I suppose you've been talking to some cad who lost and then beefed about it. Cutter wouldn't ask a chap of that sort to sit in, but a man doesn't always know his friends."

"That's what I'm trying to tell you, sir. A man can't always tell whether people are on the square or playing him for a sucker. I've heard more than one ugly report concerning him in the last few days, but I've said nothing at headquarters." McCarty added slyly: "I like a hand or two at poker myself now and then, and I'm not regularly connected with the department any more, you know. 'Tis none of my business to go bleating about a gentlemen's game and spoil their sport. I only wanted to warn you in case anything might be wrong."

"Thanks, old man, but there's no need." O'Rourke's good nature was completely restored, and now his merry, boyish eyes twinkled with a sudden inspiration. "Tell you what I'll do to convince you; I'll take you along and stand sponsor for you at the next game if you like. Cutter won't mind as long as you are there unofficially, and you can see for yourself that everything is as right as can be. I'll stake you—"

"I'd like to take you up on that some

time, sir; but I'll buy my own chips," McCarty said with a chuckle which covered his own satisfaction at having gained his point. "If I lose I'll not be squealing at headquarters about it, but raising the rents again on my tenants. By the way, you played there last Tuesday night, didn't you?"

"Yes. Why?" O'Rourke asked. "That was the last time I saw 'Gene Creveling alive."

"Mr. and Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Baillie Kip and Mr. Waverly were there, too, weren't they?" persisted McCarty.

"Yes." There was a puzzled look in O'Rourke's gray eyes.

"That made eight of you, all told."

"Yes; but we didn't all play. I mean, not at the same time," O'Rourke amended. "Creveling dropped out early and Waverly took his hand."

"I see. Then they didn't sit in the same game together. Have they, for the past couple of weeks?"

"I don't remember. I don't think they have, at that. What the devil are you getting at, Timmie?"

"Just this, sir. Did they speak at all to each other on Tuesday night?" McCarty asked bluntly. "Have you heard nothing about there being bad blood between them lately?"

"Why—no." O'Rourke paused reflectively. "I've heard nothing about any quarrel, and they were usually thicker than thieves, but it's funny about Tuesday night. They did not speak at all, now that I remember! Creveling was away ahead of the game, but he threw down his cards and cashed in just after Waverly came. Cutter was banking, of course, and while he settled up with Creveling, Waverly talked to Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Kip. Then when Creveling had said a general good night and gone, Waverly dropped into his chair and the game went on. I say, though, you don't mean that they could have had a serious quarrel! That any one has been trying to connect Waverly with—with what happened to Creveling? It's utterly absurd—"

"Oh, no!" McCarty interrupted hastily. "We know where Mr. Waverly was all

Thursday night, even if there had been any suspicion against him. There's been some talk of a quarrel, though, that involved somebody else, and we had to look into it, of course. Well, I'll be getting along, now, sir. If Mr. Cutter and the other gentlemen don't mind, I'd like mighty well to sit in one of their games. 'Twould be something to remember."

"Oh, Cutter 'll be glad to have you; you'd be a friend at court, you know, if your colleagues at headquarters got inquisitive about what was being pulled off, and if a friend of mine from the old country wasn't welcome to play with the rest, I'd quit the game myself!" O'Rourke laughed. "But come and say hello to Margaret before you go; she's writing letters in her own little sitting-room, but she'll not take it kindly if you leave without a word with her."

The apartment into which McCarty was ushered was hung all in pale, cool greens, with great bowls of jonquils standing all about, and Lady Peggy appeared to his enraptured gaze very like a spring flower herself in her softly flowing lavender robe as she looked up from her desk and held out her little hand with a smile of welcome.

"Good evening, Mr. McCarty. When are you coming to dine with us as you promised?" she asked. "We've years of friendship that weren't lost but just mislaid to pick up again, you know, and I'm hungry for a talk about the home people and the home land."

McCarty flushed redly and his eyes fell. It was a minute before he found his voice.

"Thank you kindly, Lady Peggy. I'd be honored to come some time when you've an evening to spare and my work is done," he stammered. "There's none of my own left in the old country now, and 'tis long since I stopped writing, so I'll have to ask the news of you."

"I'll have plenty for you!" she smiled. "Do you remember Father Culhane? I hear from him regularly, and he gives me all the gossip of the parish, from the price of pigs to the latest baby!"

Ten minutes of pleasant chatter followed and then McCarty tore himself determinedly away to get to the shop beneath his

rooms before M. Girard had retired for the night. He found a light glowing dimly from the rear, but the door was bolted, and he rapped smartly upon the glass panel.

Mincing footsteps sounded from within, and a withered little man opened the door and peered out.

"Ah, it is you, my friend! *Entrez!*" He bowed jerkily and waved with a grand manner toward the back of the shop, where behind faded brocade curtains which once had graced the boudoir of a king's favorite he had arranged a sort of study for himself. Here was his Voltaire and his box of long, slender, odoriferous cigars, his chess-board, and the 'cello from which haunting strains rose now and again to McCarty's rooms, to fill him with sentimental melancholy or lively exasperation, according to his mood. Here, too, M. Girard kept his shop accounts and entertained the few who came to see him, for he was an old man and lonely.

"Say, Girard, a funny thing happened to-day!" McCarty began. "I came to tell you about it earlier, but you were away."

"Out to the cemetery." M. Girard pulled a second chair up to the grate where a scant handful of coals were glowing. "Sit close, for there is still the chill of winter in the air. My bones, they felt it out there in the damp of new-turned earth. But what has happened to-day?"

"I ran across a piece of yours; that old Chinese cabinet with birds on it! That is, if you were telling me the truth about it when you said it was the only one of its kind in this country," he added with knowing craftiness.

"It is the only one of its kind in existence, my friend!" the old man retorted with dignity. "Why do you doubt?"

"Because I understood the lady to say that it had been brought to America for her."

"Ah, these new-rich!" M. Girard shrugged expressively. "They will make up the fairy tale to aggrandize themselves, is it not so? If you saw my cabinet Chinois you must have been at the house of Mme. Baillie Kip. It does not surprise me, M. McCarty; you must have seen other beautiful things from my shop here during

the last few days, only you did not chance to recognize them."

"I did?" McCarty stared. "You've been reading about the Creveling case, haven't you? You don't mean to say that he was a customer of yours!"

"He and several of his friends." The old man shook his head. "It is very sad. M. Creveling has been coming to my shop for two or three years past; not often, you comprehend, but when he did come it was usually for something of rare value. It was he who purchased that cabinet for Mme. Kip."

Across McCarty's mental vision there flashed again the man in the fur coat and he asked:

"How long ago? It seems to me I saw that cabinet here only lately."

"No, my friend. It is six months, at the least. But wait, I will tell you to the day." He rose and, going to the high, spindle-legged desk, he took a small, flat volume from a drawer and ruffled its pages. "Ah, here it is! M. Creveling purchased it for Mme. Kip on the 20th of October. Before that I had sent to her from him a scent-bottle and a fan or two—mere bijouterie. The cabinet was his first gift to her of value and his last! Shall I tell you? It is indiscreet, perhaps, that I gossip now, but it is a piquant little *histoire* which might have come from the pages of De Maupassant!"

He paused with a reminiscent smile, and McCarty, who gathered only that he was on the trail of some new dope which would be of possible use in the case, sat up straighter in his chair.

"Let's have it, Girard. He quit making presents to her, do you mean? Why?"

"That is the *histoire*, M. McCarty. Mme. Kip, she have no knowledge of the *artistique*, no love of beautiful things as have most women, even of the people; it is the price only to her which matters! If a thing is of expense, *voilà*, it is to be desired; if it is exquisite, but of little value in money, she has not eyes to see!" There was immeasurable scorn in his voice. "It is a month after the gift of the cabinet to her that *madame* comes to me and brings back the two fans; she must have money. I must sell them for her. *Eh bien*, that is to me an

affair of business, but when I tell her their value she flies into a rage! She had thought them worth much more and she accuses me of trying to cheat her! I refuse then to sell them for her, I show her to the door, but she makes the apology and in the end leaves them for what they may bring.

"Not two days later M. Creveling comes; he desires to know if I have found for him a vase to match one which he has, and when my back is turned he sees the fans in the case! He asks how it is that they are there and me, what can I say? I cannot make of myself in his eyes a receiver of stolen goods! He buys them, giving me twice what I asked, twice what he paid before, and takes them away, but his smile, it is not pleasant!

"I send the money to Mme. Kip, saying only that it is the price which I have received for her fans, but the next day she is here once more and this time her anger, it is *affreuse!* She says that I have 'sold her out,' but I do not comprehend; it is only her fans that I have sold! *Alors*, M. Creveling sends no more *bijouterie* to *madame* from my shop! It is droll, is it not?"

"It is that!" McCarty laughed, but his quick brain was piecing together the story, fitting it into the mosaic of fact and theory which he had formed. "Girard, you old devil, I'll bet you did it on purpose! But she's still a customer of yours, isn't she? Didn't I see her in here after closing hours one night not a month ago? She had on an evening-dress with a motoring-cloak thrown over it and she came in an open car with a man in a fur coat."

M. Girard nodded.

"It was she. Another friend of hers who is an occasional customer told her of a snuff-box which had just reached me from France. It was of gold set with amethysts of rare color and said to be of the time of Louis the Just, and since there could be no doubt of its value, *madame* must have it! It was purchased for her that night, *monsieur*, by the man in the fur coat."

"And who was he?" McCarty asked. "Didn't you know him, too? Didn't you get his name?"

"But, yes. He gave me a check and it was under his name that I recorded the

sale here in my book." He turned again to the flat volume and ran through its pages rapidly. "Here, M. McCarty! Come, you shall see it for yourself."

McCarty rose with alacrity and, crossing to his host, bent over the ledger and read the name written there in M. Girard's small, fine hand. The next minute he started back in amazement.

"For the love of the saints!" he ejaculated. "And 'twas not a month ago! Think of your putting it down in your little book, so neat and certain! Many's the time I've thought to myself that it was the poor business man you were, with everything higgledy-piggledy in your shop, and dust that you could scrape off with a knife, but I'll take it all back! Keep that little book safe, Girard, for it may be of more use than you know!"

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### AN IRISH INQUISITOR.

McCARTY'S long years of training on the force had enable him as a matter of habit to put aside whatever cases he was engaged upon and mechanically compose himself for slumber when the time for needed rest came, but that Sunday night was an exception and he lay wide-eyed until dawn. As he tossed and turned and thumped his pillow in exasperation he seemed to be wrestling with some almost personal problem which confronted him, and no small phase of it was his promise to Hill to help clear his wife of the charge against her.

The first light of morning revealed him haggard and with a grayish pallor overspreading his usually ruddy, cheerful countenance, but the firm set of his square jaw betokened that he had arrived at some decision and characteristically he rose to act upon it at once.

At headquarters he found that Inspector Druet had already preceded him and the latter's morose greeting attested to taut nerves and the bitterness of acknowledged failure.

"You saw the papers, Mac?" he demanded. "The *Bulletin* is the loudest of

all in its outcry against us for charging Hill with the murder and then having to let him go again on the strength of his alibi. And you gave that young pup, Ballard, the beat on it Saturday! That's gratitude for you! We get no credit at all for finding Ilsa Helwig."

"And since when are you looking for gratitude from the press, or even recognition?" McCarty shrugged. "Sure, the loss of the emeralds and that girl's jumping her bail are lost sight of in all the excitement about the murder, and small wonder."

"Well, if we're at a standstill it is some satisfaction to know that Terhune is, too!" A smile of grim humor twitched the inspector's mouth. "George Alexander is too proud to explain publicly why that pistol belonging to the bookkeeper was in his possession or I believe he would prefer a charge or criminal libel against our celebrated scientific criminologist."

"At that 'twas not a bad case he made out against him," remarked McCarty.

"Only it fell down flat. We found that taxi-driver yesterday afternoon; the one with the scarred face who drove Alexander home from Columbus Circle. He substantiates his story all right, and Terhune is hiding his sulks behind his usual calmly superior air. I saw him last night and he intimated that he had something fresh up his sleeve."

"Well, so have we." McCarty smiled.

"There's nothing up my sleeve but my arm," the inspector admitted frankly. "Every suspect we get in the case seems to have an alibi pat. Have you doped out anything since yesterday?"

"I lost a good night's sleep over it, sir, but maybe 'twas not wasted after all." McCarty drew a chair up to the desk and seated himself. "I was that twisted and turned in the case that I went back to first principles and thought over everything in my mind from the minute I saw that Bodansky lad skulking along ahead of me on the avenue, and I got an idea. What have you done with him?"

"Bodansky?" The inspector looked across at his colleague in surprise. "He's up in the precinct station-house waiting to be charged with attempted burglary."

"Will you send for him, sir? I'll explain while he's on the way down. I want to ask him a few questions along a different line than we took with him before."

Inspector Druet pressed the buzzer in his desk and when his subordinate appeared, briefly gave the order. Then as the door closed once more he sat back in his chair.

"Go on. What's the idea? Don't try to have him charged, Mac, with a crime we can't prove on him or this time the press will howl for my official head!"

"They've howled for it more than once before, sir, but it hasn't fallen yet!" McCarty grinned affectionately at his chief and then his face grew serious. "I'm not going to bring any charge whatever against the young crook, but instead, with your permission, I'm going to tell him we'll let him down as easy as we can if he'll come across with a little information."

"Information?" the inspector repeated with raised eyebrows. "Didn't I have him on the carpet down here for three hours on Friday? Your own statement proves that he couldn't have fired that shot, and he beat it the minute he found the body."

"Yes, but why did he pick on the Creveling house in the first place?" McCarty asked suddenly. "He was not just sauntering along looking for a likely lay when I saw him first; he was on the job and knew where he was going, you can bet on that! He said it was his first trick and he only tried to turn it to prove to the rest of the gang that he was all there, but you know from experience yourself, sir, that the yellowest crook will keep faith with his bunch if he's got the fear of God in him."

"What do you mean?" the inspector asked. "You don't think he was working alone then?"

"Alone, maybe, but he was not wandering along the avenue looking for the first open window to crawl through! I don't say he was working under orders, but he'd either been tipped off or else he'd found out there were valuables in the house and it is not any too well guarded just now. *Something* steered him toward Creveling, sir, and I'm going to have it out of him!"

But when Bodansky was brought in he did not at first find the matter as simple

as he had anticipated. The young gangster seated himself docilely enough on the edge of the chair to which the inspector pointed a peremptory hand and his small, ratlike eyes darted swiftly from one to the other of the two determined faces before him, but he carried himself with an air of self assurance which had been lacking in the first encounter.

"Look here, Joe, I suppose you know you're in for a stretch?" McCarty began impressively when a glance from Inspector Druet put the interrogation into his hands.

Bodansky grinned foolishly, but the gleam of shrewdness lingered in his gaze.

"I ain't done nottin'," he averred doggedly. "'Course I had de gat an' de jack an' de keys on me, but it's a foist offense, barrin' dat stretch in de reform'tory an' I'll get off light."

"What makes you think so?" demanded McCarty. "Do you suppose your gang would bother to have any wires pulled to get you off, you poor little runt of a white-livered piker? That Lexington Avenue gang of cheap crooks have only been kidding you if you think they stand in with the ward boss, let alone anybody higher up."

"I ain't kickin'," vouchsafed Bodansky, slumping comfortably forward in his chair with his bullet-head outthrust between his hunched shoulders like that of a turtle. "I'm willin' to take whatever youse can hand me. I didn't have nottin' to do wit' croakin' Crawford—"

"Crawford?" McCarty caught him up sharply. "So you knew Creveling as 'Crawford,' eh?"

The slumped figure stiffened suddenly and the rat eyes shifted, but he drawled:

"Creveling, was it? It's all de same to me. I t'ought youse called him 'Crawford' dat night, an' I ain't been readin' de poipers regular since!"

He grinned again, but his lips trembled and he raised a slack hand to cover them.

McCarty seized the opportunity which the final remark presented.

"If you had, you'd have known better than to take that line with us, Joe. We're on to it that Creveling was known as 'Crawford' sometimes, and why, but we didn't think you were in on that deal.

You'll go up for something more than attempted burglary now, my gossoon!"

A shade of terror darkened the pasty face and Joe Bodansky writhed in his chair.

"I dunno what youse mean!" he whined. "Honest t' Gawd I never heard of dat guy till I saw him lyin' dere wit his face gone! If he was known as Crawford youse must 've said so den an' dat's how I got it! Honest t' Gawd—"

McCarty turned to the dumfounded inspector and asked cryptically:

"Shall we get the other one over from the Tombs and face 'em, sir? We've got it now that the big fellow was holding out on us about Joe here, and when he knows Joe give him away—"

A thin, wailing cry broke in upon him and Bodansky, shivering with fright, turned imploringly to the inspector.

"I ain't no snitcher! I didn't give him away! What are youse trying to frame me for? If youse get him over an' he thinks I spilled on him youse had better send me up for life, for he'll see dat I'm croaked de foist time I show me face in de street! I ain't in on his game, on my modder, I ain't! He don't even know I'm wise to it!"

"Then come clean!" the inspector advised grimly. "Tell us how you knew Creveling was Crawford?"

"It was all on account of dat skirt I got stuck on," Bodansky admitted with evident reluctance. "I told youse de Gawd's trut' when I said dat I'd never turned a trick before de night youse nabbed me comin' out of dat window, but I stood in wit' de gang an' got my bit when dey pulled off anyt'ing, see? About two mont's ago a guy was rolled over on Madison Avenue; oh, I didn't have anyt'ing to do wit' dat part of it, an' I don't know who did de rollin' so I ain't afraid to open me trap about it! Anyhow, when de split was made, in Hogan's back room I dragged down twenty iron men, an' de foist t'ing I t'ought of was a gold bracelet wit' red stones in it over across de way in Kosakoff's window. Me goil had been lookin' at it an' hintin' around dat de guy dat owns de candy-store where she works would get it for her. Say, how did youse get on to Kosakoff, anyhow? He don't even run a hock-shop like most



of de odder fences do, an' dat ticker-repair-in' job is a hell of a good blind."

He paused and the inspector shook his head, carefully avoiding McCarty's gaze.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV.

##### GREEN FIRE.

"I T'S nothing to you how we get our dope, Joe. Go on with your story, and mind you give it to us straight!"

"De minute I got mine I beat it across de street to Kosakoff's place, like I'm tellin' youse," Bodansky went on hurriedly with an injured air. "It was late an' he was just puttin' up his shutters, but I flashed me twenty an' he let me in. He was gettin' de bracelet out of de window when de door opens an' in comes a regular swell. He's got his lid pulled down over his eyes an' his coat-collar turned up like he's scared of somebody seein' him, an' right away I says to myself: 'Dis Kosakoff's a fence, all right, an' dat guy's some high-class crook.'

"Kosakoff gives him de o-o and shoves de bracelet into my mitt, walkin' quick around de counter, but de guy looks up an' I see he's no crook. He don't seem to see me at all, but he turns up his nose like de joint was dirt an' old Kosakoff a dog. I'm pretendin' to be lampin' de bracelet, see, but I'm wisin' myself up to de layout. Old Kosakoff has got de guy's number all right an' he's tryin' to get him off down de odder end of de store so's I won't pipe what's goin' on, but I edges along, too, an' I hears de guy say somet'in' about 't'irty t'ousand' an' I t'inks I'm goin' dippy!

"Old Kosakoff don't turn a hair, dough; he's busy openin' a door at de back of de store when all of a sudden de guy pulls somet'in' out of his coat-pocket just as if it was a handful of junk an' I see a flash of green fire dat would knock your lamps out! Kosakoff turned round den an' grabbed him by de arm an' hauled him into de back room, but I'm still foolin' wit' de bracelet when dey come out. Kosakoff goes to de door wit' him an' says: 'Good night, Mr. Crawford. Call again.'

"De guy's no sooner gone den I flings

down my twenty iron men an' grabs de bracelet an' beats it. Old Kosakoff tries to stall me, see, but I'm on my way, an' I trails dis guy to—to de house where youse caught me last week."

"How did you know that he lived there?" the inspector asked.

"'Cause he could have made it straight from Thoid to Fift' an' den up, but instead of dat he dodges nort' an' den sout' an' back an' t'rough again, lookin' behind all de toime an' I knew de signs; many's de toime I dodges de bulls de same way, only he's an amateur, see, an' he don't get on to it dat I'm trailin' him. He hits Fift' at last 'way above his house an' den he t'inks he's clear, an' he beats it home an' opens de door wit' his own key. I spots de number an' de general lay an' chases back to me own hang-out. I couldn't figger whedder he'd lifted dem green stones or was just out of dough an' ashamed to have anybody know he was partin' wit' some of his own, but I t'ought dere 'd be more where t'irty t'ousand wort' came from. I made up my mind dat I'd work alone an' make a haul dat 'd open de lamps of de gang, an' I been watchin' de house off an' on ever since den. De window bein' open dat night last week was just plain luck, for I'd brought me keys wit' me to try on de little side door. Honest t' Gawd, I was workin' alone an' Kosakoff don't know I'm wise to him."

"Oh, can that!" McCarty put in before the inspector could speak. "You didn't quit cold on Kosakoff until you had the goods on him! When did you wise yourself up that he was as big a fence as he is?"

Bodansky hesitated, running the tip of his tongue along his thin, bloodless lips and glancing quickly from one to the other. Then a sly grin broke over his face.

"Youse got me right," he admitted. "No guy dat run a dump like dat, sellin' cheap sparklers an' fixin' broke tickers for a livin' could grab a t'irty t'ousand deal wit' out battin' an eye, an' why would dat swell guy have come dere unless he'd been tipped off? I figgers dat maybe I can get in on Kosakoff's game wit' him, but I lays off him quick meself when I dopes out who his pals is. I got plenty sense to know when

I'm out of me own class, an' I ain't opened me trap about him, not even to de gang, till now."

"Much you know about who his pals are!" McCarty jeered provocatively. "If we weren't on to his game until just lately how could you wise yourself up?"

"Well, I had a steer, didn't I?" Bodansky retorted. "I'd spotted him an' I laid low an' watched his joint. Dere's a couple of odder fences dat I knows—by sight—an' I lamps 'em goin' to him an' right dere me dogs gets kind of frostbit, for I'm wise dat his dump must be a sort of a clearin' house for de rest an' him de king-pin of dat partic'lar bunch, but I didn't know dat he was de main guy of all—de head go-between for Bronheim himself—till I sees Spanish Lou an' Diamond Harry sneakin' in de side door."

A quick glance pregnant with meaning passed between McCarty and his chief. Bronheim had been the most notorious fence on the East Side and long and fruitless had been the efforts of the police department to locate the go-between they knew must exist.

"Bronheim's doing a stretch now up the river!" McCarty asserted.

"Sure, but he gets out in t'ree mont's, an' dey're roundin' up de organization again." Bodansky pulled himself up suddenly. "Say, I don't know dat, I'm just talking t'rough me hat! I ain't got not'in' on Kosakoff, at dat. It ain't a crime for a swell guy to go over to de East Side to sell de fam'ly jewels, an' as for Spanish an' Harry, dey might have reformed an' gone dere peaceable, like I done, to buy somet'in' for dere goils. I only got cold feet like I told you, an' laid off de whole works. You can't prove not'in' by me!"

"You've gone too far to stop now, Joe!" the inspector said sternly. "You come through with the whole business or we'll put you on the stand against Kosakoff. Who were the other fences you saw?"

But Joe Bodansky's suddenly aroused suspicion that, in his own parlance, he was being "played for a come-on" had crystalized into certainty with the eagerness of the inspector's attitude and once more he

slumped in his chair. A film seemed to glaze his close-set eyes and when he replied it was in the singsong whine of the habitual crook.

"Ain't I told you I only know 'em by sight? One of de gang—I forgot which—pointed 'em out to me once, but he might have been kiddin' me! As for Harry and Spanish, I never lamped 'em before in me loife; I just got a hunch it was dem from-seein' deir mugs in de poipers when Bronheim was tried. Honest t' Gawd—"

"Send him back, sir," McCarty urged in a rapid undertone to the inspector. "You'll get nothing more out of him this day, and we've got a good lead as it is."

Late that afternoon McCarty presented himself once more at the Creveling house and to his request for an interview with Mrs. Creveling the butler brought an affirmative and even cordial response.

"You can go right up, sir. I think Mrs. Creveling was about to send down for your inspector, anyway, for there was a scene this morning between 'er and that Mr. Terhune that I couldn't 'elp 'earin' most of, and what I missed Yvonne, the maid, told us at lunch. She ain't satisfied with 'ow 'e's conducting of the case, to put it mild, sir, and she told Mrs. Waverley as 'ow she would find what progress you was making."

As before, McCarty found Mrs. Creveling in her boudoir, but this time she was pacing the floor restlessly and a faint spot of color glowed in either cheek while Mrs. Waverley, curled up on the window-seat, watched her with an inscrutable look in her long, feline eyes.

"I am glad you have come, Mr. McCarty." Mrs. Creveling gestured imperiously toward a chair. "You were here yesterday, I understand, but the doctor had counseled absolute rest for me. I cannot rest, I shall not, until I know who killed my husband! Have you come with news for us?"

"News of a kind for you, ma'am," McCarty responded with a deprecatory side glance at the figure in the window. "I'm sorry, but I'll have to see you in private."

"Have to?" Mrs. Creveling raised her eyebrows. "You can say whatever you wish before Mrs. Waverley."

"I've instructions from headquarters, ma'am." McCarty's tone was respectful, but he shook his head firmly. "What I have to say must be said to you alone, but of course, you're free to use your own discretion afterward."

Mrs. Waverley had made no move to rise and was listening with a supercilious amusement to the little tilt, but Mrs. Creveling's eyes met those of McCarty in sudden question and then she turned to her companion.

"If you don't mind, Stella— You see we are in the hands of the authorities now—"

"Quite so." Mrs. Waverley laughed and rose. "Send Yvonne for me when the dark secret has been disclosed. I'm going to take a nap."

Without deigning to notice the presence of McCarty she moved to the door and when it had closed behind her McCarty advanced to the table beside which Mrs. Creveling had halted and drew from his pocket a leather case.

"For one thing, Mrs. Creveling," he said. "I've come to bring you these!"

Before her amazed eyes he opened the case and poured out upon the table a stream of huge, unset emeralds which glowed with a rich but almost sinister vernal light.

"My emeralds!" she gasped. "I read in the papers that Ilsa had given herself up, but I did not know that these had been recovered! She had pried them from their settings—"

"She never touched them, ma'am. She never even saw them." There was a stern note in McCarty's tones. "Ilsa is as innocent of theft as you are yourself."

"Then who—" Mrs. Creveling's eyes met his and the flash of green fire from the jewels upon the table seemed for an instant reflected in their depths. As though some premonition of the truth came to her she shrank back and sank slowly into the nearest chair. "It must have been Ilsa, and I am determined that she shall be punished! The mere restitution of these jewels is not enough; she must be made an example—"

"The thief who stole them is beyond reach of your punishment, ma'am."

Mrs. Creveling's breath came pantingly.

"How do you know? What have you learned?" she demanded, and then as though afraid to hear his answer she added hurriedly: "But it is absurd! No one else could have taken them, no one could have entered my dressing-room during my absence. Mr. Creveling himself testified to that! I had seen them with my own eyes when I closed the case not five minutes before—"

"'Twas these you saw, ma'am." McCarty produced another case, the replica of the first and opened it, disclosing a necklace and stomacher of antique gold set with small diamonds and large, deep-green stones, whose color seemed dead and flat beside the warm glow of those lying loose upon the table. "They're a good imitation put back in your own old settings, and 'twas done between the time you got the real ones from the vault and the night you meant to wear them."

"Do you mean that they were taken from my husband's safe?" Her voice was a mere whisper.

"Yes, ma'am, and by the only one who knew the combination; the same who entered your dressing-room after Ilsa had left it for a minute, and took the fakes after he learned that you meant to have them reset almost at once and knew that you'd find out the truth."

"What do you mean?" she cried. "Are you daring to insinuate—"

"I'm not insinuating anything, ma'am, but I'll speak plainer if you like," McCarty said grimly. "We've found the man who made the fakes and he can testify that 'twas Mr. Creveling himself who brought the original set to him to have the emeralds prized out and copied. We've got the fence—the receiver of stolen goods—who bought the real stones from Mr. Creveling for twenty thousand dollars, and he can prove who his customer was. Mr. Creveling saw his chance and threw the blame on Ilsa, but he never meant to have her prosecuted for it, I'll say that for him; he only thought to gain time. 'Twas your husband himself who was the thief, Mrs. Creveling!"

**This story will be concluded in next week's issue of the ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY, the consolidated title under which both magazines will appear hereafter as one.**



**V**ERY strange and treacherous is the loco. It is the insidious, ever-present temptation of the open plains. It lurks, a queerly delicate, velvety-looking, light-colored plant among the tufts of bunch grass at the edge of the cactus beds, or, sometimes it is found crowding closely against the roots of the Spanish dagger.

Always the loco is the curse—

As the *mirahuana* masters the Yaqui, as the mescal fills with unholy passion the peon of Sonora or Jalisco; as the opium, the morphin, or the chloral makes slaves of men, so does the loco, the weed diablo, lure the cattle and horses of the broad llanos with its seductive charms; after the first foolish taste, until it entices them to utter ruin.

In the thick clump of willows by the little seep on the slope of Sentinel Mountain, not far above the smooth sand-beach of the Cimmaron, Shag began his life. There it was that Brown Sides, the beautiful heifer that gave him birth, sought shelter to bring, unmolested by the others of the herd, and safe from the eyes of prowling wolf or coyote, her first calf into the world. For three days the young cow, with her wonderful calf, remained in the thicket where the miracle of life had come.

Then, the time being June, and the season dry, the seep failed. The water was gone from the little spring. Another three days without drink and Brown Sides, the fever of maternity still on her, with a low-

moaned warning to Shag to lie hidden till she returned, tried to reach the thin stream trickling in the narrow channel of the Cimmaron, a dozen yards beyond the white beach of quick-sand.

Shag saw her die.

In silent, wide-eyed dread he looked on while Brown Sides was drawn slowly, surely, down by the death that lay beneath the smooth, seemingly innocent beach of the Cimmaron.

Once, answering her frantic struggles, he started to go to her—his soft hoofs barely touched the treacherous bar when an angry bellow, a rebuke in which was the terror and agony of mother love, sent him back to the thicket and safety.

It was his first lesson, and Shag did not forget.

Silently he lay among the willows and did not stir, but filled with wonder that the beautiful Brown Sides, the mother, did not come. For two days more he kept in the cover. The nights were long, and in spite of himself he shook each time he heard the near or distant yelp of a coyote or the more terrifying howl of the great loafer wolves when their deep-toned voices echoed from among the rocky cañons of Del Christo range. Yet he made no sound nor did he move. Something told him keen ears were listening, sharp eyes were watching, and that life itself—in those black hours—was the stake in a game of hide and seek. He ached with hunger. His dry tongue licked the sweat-beads from his black, satiny muz-

zle. Even then he did not leave the thicket of willows. The stupor of famine and fatigue came over him. He curled himself into a golden-brown ball and buried his nose in the hollow of his side. His eyes closed—he would die.

Then it was that Bent Horn, bawling piteously, crashed into the cover of willows where Shag lay dying in a huddled heap.

Mad with pain was Bent Horn. Two days and a night before she had left her own calf by the Black Rock, on the slope of Old Capaline, while she sought the water-hole. When she returned it was gone—carried away by Long Tail, the great yellow panther, he that has his den in the Big Cave on the far side of the dead volcano. Frantic with the burning torture of the swollen bag, Bent Horn had been searching.

Shag staggered to his feet, shaking with weakness, and stood bewildered with terror, until he saw it was one like Brown Sides—his mother—and not some swift, gray-furred marauder of the range. Bereaved mother and orphaned calf, for one moment, in mutual surprise, studied each other. Then Bent Horn welcomed the muzzle of Shag, thrust greedily into her flank, searching for the milk that would put life again into his veins.

After that the months passed quickly.

Shag and his foster-mother ranged together over the slopes of Sentinel Mountain, across the wide Llano de Gato, and at times far up the lava-strewn sides of Old Capaline.

Even then the loco had a fascination for Shag. Often he found the queer, sprangling weed half hidden among the other growth. Always it challenged him—though he knew the wiser ones of the herd shunned it, and Bent Horn herself, more than once, with an angry push of her head, shoved him aside as he was about to pluck the dangerous stuff.

That fall Shag had his first experience with man—and ever after he hated the creature.

With hundreds of cows and other calves like himself, born too late for the spring branding, he was gathered into a great herd. For one night, at the North Springs,

the place of the round-up, they were held. The next day strange things happened. Shag saw, many times, a rider dash among the cattle, his horse leap between a calf and its mother, and while other riders kept back the angry cows, the calf bawling in agony and terror, was stretched on the ground, a thin spiral of smoke curled up from its hip or side, and the smell of burning hair mixed with the dust and fume of air.

It came Shag's turn. The instant he saw the roan stallion, with the slender, dark-eyed young cowboy on his back, whirl toward him, he started to run. A rope dropped over his head. Shag leaped into the air only to be jerked wickedly to the ground. He was dragged to the fire. Quickly the heavy boot of Skinny Rawlins was on the neck of the helpless calf, and the cruel knife and the branding iron were doing their work. With his eyes set and glassy from pain, his tongue lolling from his mouth, Shag endured the torture, and yet he made no sound.

"You want to watch that feller, Skinny," th' Ramblin' Kid warned, while the roan stallion held taut the rope that was choking Shag. "He's one of them sullen kind. When he gets up he's liable to give you a round!"

"I'll bite his ear if he does!" Skinny bantered, holding the smoking iron against the quivering hip. "Gosh, he's a pretty little cuss, ain't he?"

It was over. With a flick of his foot Skinny loosened the rope and turned to lay the iron again among the coal. Then, dazed, but with red murder in his heart, Shag sprang to his feet. He saw the cowboy bending above the fire. Simultaneous with th' Ramblin' Kid's: "Look out, Skinny, he's comin'!" Shag lunged savagely at his enemy. Skinny sprawled profanely in the dust and ashes. Shag, thinking he had killed him, felt better, and darted past the riders and hid himself in the herd. Th' Ramblin' Kid laughed.

"What th' hell's so darned funny about that?" Skinny questioned plaintively as he straightened up and rubbed the cinders and dirt from his hands.

"A good deal—for the other feller.

That's what I call retribution pronto an' sudden!" and the roan stallion wheeled to cut out and drag to the fire another victim.

From that time on, Shag was wary when he saw a horse and rider.

So it came a year and a half later, when the fall beef-hunt was on, the magnificent, golden-brown steer with the K-Bar brand on his plump hip, hid himself so well in the dense mesquite cover on the side of the little ravine high up on the north slope of Old Capaline, that he was overlooked and escaped the fate that waits for cattle at the end of the long journey in the crowded cars. It was that year, also, they gathered the cows that would do for beef, and Bent Horn disappeared forever from the life of Shag.

The winter dragged. With the other cattle Shag huddled in the brush along the Cimmaron while the blizzards swept across the Llano de Gato and beat against the sides of Sentinel Mountain. In the long nights the mournful howl of the loafer wolves called from crag to crag of Del Christo range.

In time the chinook fanned the slopes of Del Christo range; breathed over the Llano de Gato, and the grass sprung forth again. Soon the lean ribs were padded with flesh, the hair became smooth and soft and glistened in the sunlight, and Shag, he with the mighty horns, the broad loins, the strong neck, was the splendid, the grand, the beautiful steer.

Then life cursed him with its greatest joy and agony.

It was the Red One. She came, many miles, from the Vermejo, far to the west, and on her side was the great mark of the Anchor A. Her soft hair was the color, almost, of blood, or the flower of the scarlet cacti—so bright was it.

Marvelous indeed was she, the young heifer, the stranger with the slender body, the trim legs, the long, graceful tail—its bush touching her hocks; and the horns so slim and round and very even, their black tips sharp and keen as the point of the stiletto; and the eyes—they were the wonder—in them was the pathos, the longing, the mystery of those of the elk or the antelope, and they were as large and brown!

Shag found her, alone, in the narrow cañon through which the Purgatory comes down from among the high peaks of Del Christo.

Their muzzles touched, and in the mere mingling of their breath there was a mad, torturing caress.

From that moment, for one month—from the time when the lark-spur shoots out its purple spike until the seed-pods are on the stems—Shag lived in the shadow of the gates of Paradise and on the edge of hell. And, who shall say, may it not be that experience drove him at last to surrender to the deadly loco—the plant diablo?

For that month Shag and the Red One were inseparable.

Shag led her to places where the grass was greenest and most tender; he guided her to the clear spring where the water, very cold, rushes from under the Big Rock at the base of Capaline; at night he would not leave her, and watched, eager to battle in her defense, should the gray wolves, or even the great yellow panther come; and the Red One seemed confident to have it so. Yet, always, in the heart of Shag, was the fear that he would lose her—the black dread that sometimes there would come the day when she would leave him.

They were crossing from Sentinel Mountain to the slopes of Capaline; in the dry couleé, far out on the Llano de Gato, in the warm sand, they—Shag and the Red One—laid down to rest; there the Roan Bull, he with the thick neck, the heavy horns and the massive head, found them.

Shag answered the challenging roar of the stranger with a charge that carried death on each of his mighty horns. While they fought the Red One watched. And then, desperate, because he battled for more even than life itself, Shag threw the arrogant one to the earth—he sprang back for the rush that would drive the ebony tips of his horns into the vitals of his prostrate foe. The Red One leaped between and slashed viciously at the great brown steer. Shag swerved, to save the heifer from his own resistless rush, and her dainty horns—the keen, lancelike horns of the one he loved so well—ripped his flesh from

shoulder to flank. The Red One was fighting for the stranger!

Making no move, he stood and looked as the Roan Bull scrambled to his feet; then, when the Red One nosed at the bleeding wounds of his conquered enemy, Shag turned and silently, with a broken heart, walked away.

For three days he ate no food. On a lonely point above the cluster of willows in which Brown Sides gave him life, Shag stood, silent—scarcely moving, and brooded over the curse that had been laid on him the day, at the North Springs, the rope dropped over his head and he was dragged to the knife and the branding iron.

Then he tasted the loco—the devil-weed.

He had crossed to Capaline, to that side of the dead volcano on which grow the few mesquites, and here and there a pinion—and the scattering Spanish daggers. Grazing carelessly, without interest, his nose touched the deadly plant. Instantly Shag knew and paused, smelling curiously at the white, velvety leaves. Deliberately and with reckless design his tongue whipped the sprangling stems into his mouth!

A miracle happened.

A strange abandon came over Shag; queer dreams filled his brain; weird, distorted images appeared and disappeared before his eyes; his body throbbed with energy beyond all measure; he seemed to grow, suddenly, into a supercreature, with power to master all the world! His muscles tingled—he was strong—strong—nothing could resist him! The blood in his veins was fire; in his feet there was a new lightness, and speed swifter than the roaring winds was in his legs! His mighty horns—he could drive them through the very rock walls of Old Capaline! Under the spell of the loco, at one step, he could cross the Cimmaron—with a single push of his great head it would be easy to throw down Sentinel Mountain or plow a path through Del Christo range!

Then came the hot passion to kill.

He would seek the Roan Bull and kill him. He would kill all bulls—all the bulls in the world. Then he would search for

the human creatures whom once he had shunned and dreaded to meet—and he would kill them—kill them— And the Red One, he would find her also, and she should die—no, ah, no—he would not kill the Red One—instead, he would lead her to the wonderful loco, the magic weed, that she, too, might eat and become as he had become, greater than all others, and they alone—he and the Red One—together would rule the mountains and the plains, even from the tops of the blue Costejos, beyond the Vermejo, to the far edge of Llano de Gato!

He went down among the cattle, searching for Roan Bull.

Though he reeled when he walked, he was not afraid, and the cattle, when they saw the look in his eyes, made way before him. Even Black Horn, the old bull that, since Shag could remember, had been master of the herd, would not fight him. They knew—these puny things—that he, Shag, was the Great One! He lifted his head, shook angrily the mighty horns, and with one shrill trumpet-call challenged all creation to witness that he, alone, of all steers, none, not even the bulls, dared to battle!

The delirium passed. The spirit of the loco died within him.

Once more he was only Shag, the brown steer, with the scar of the K-Bar brand on his hip, trembling with the dull hurt that gnawed at his heart when he thought of the Red One.

He went away to brood in solitude, or search again for the plant, the devil-weed, that would make him forget.

So fled the months.

When the spell of the loco possessed him he lived in the glorious world of his own wild dreams and wilder passions; when it left him he stood, with drooped head, dazed and weakened, his gaunt figure silhouetted against the sky-line above some lonely ridge or bleak point, while black horror tore at his soul. Such times, though the gray wolves howled dismally through the long nights, Shag gave no heed, and, somehow, even Crooked Fang, the ferocious, with his pack, dared—not yet at least—attack the great steer standing moodily far from the herd.

Yet, once while standing so, in the mood of despair, Shag was near to death.

Skinny Rawlins, th' Ramblin' Kid—the latter riding then, as on the day of the curse, the roan stallion—and with them Old Heck, owner of the cattle carrying the K-Bar brand, saw the steer on the slope of Capaline. They rode close, to read the mark on his wasted hip.

"Hell," Old Heck exclaimed in disgust, and jerked the forty-four at his side from its holster as he spoke, after one glance at the sunken flanks, the rough hair, the dull eyes of Shag—"another K-Bar critter 'locoed'—bad! Just as well shoot him—"

"Not that—not while I'm here—you don't!" the young cow-puncher on the little stallion cried angrily while his black eyes narrowed with a wicked gleam, and the bronco he rode leaped between Shag and the muzzle of Old Heck's gun. "Give th' poor cuss a chance! Let him play out his hand to the end. How'd you like for somebody to send you to hell with a bullet between your eyes just because you get drunk once in a while?"

The gun was returned to its place.

Spring came once more, and Shag seldom wandered from the slope above the basalt cliff at the foot of Capaline. Much loco grew on that side of the dead volcano, and more and more he craved the deadly drug.

Sometimes he saw the Red One, trailing with the other cattle as they crossed the Llano de Gato, or came down to the Purgatory for water. Always he watched as long as she was in sight. Yet he made no effort to go to her. She had scorned him. It was enough. He had come to detest his own kind—all but the Red One. Stupid cowards they were that fled at his approach. They shunned him, feared him, despised him—he in turn loathed them, hated them, held them in contempt.

It was June, the month of his own birth—the fourth year—and Shag saw again the Red One. At her side was a calf.

Then he hated even the Red One also, and the thing he knew, somehow, was the offspring of Roan Bull. Then, could he have reached them, he would have killed Red One herself and the calf.

So came the day, a little while before the yellow sun dropped into the mist-caps that lay on the peaks of the Costejos, Shag saw the Red One the last time. With the young calf she crossed the Purgatory at the shallow place by the little cove sheltered by the black basalt cliff above which he stood. Soon she returned alone to the other side. Shag knew the calf was left in the cluster of willows that grows half-way between the edge of the water and the cliff at the foot of Capaline. Later he saw the Red One, with others, feeding in the broad coulee beyond the Purgatory. Then, when the shadows had covered even Sentinel Mountain, and the night was beginning to come, three riders dashed swiftly from the narrow gorge in the Del Christo range, and the Red One, and those with her, they drove at a run toward the south. The "rustlers"—they who steal cattle—had come, and unless she escape, Red One would be taken far across the border and never again return to the Llano de Gato.

After that it grew dark, and Shag, hearing no sound from the little cove, forgot the calf that was hidden there.

The night was far gone; the moon, in its last quarter, was but a sliver of silver that hung above the pinions on Sentinel Mountain, when Shag, as in a dream, heard the rustle of soft feet brushing the bunch grass, and saw the shadow of Gray Flash, the loafer wolf, hunting alone this time, slip along the trail that led from the ridge above the basalt cliff to the little cove below. He gave no heed. A moment later and the agonized bellow of a calf, in mortal terror, was flung up over the crumbling wall of rock. Still Shag did not seem to hear. Again the cry—now no more than a gasping moan—rang out, and yet, by some miracle, it reached the drug-burdened brain of Shag, and suddenly the great form straightened up; the thing he heard was the call of one—a weaker one—of his own kind, crying for help, and to his disordered fancy the voice that called was the voice of the Red One!

Then Shag, the pariah, the outcast, the depraved and despised one of the range, rushed blindly, reeling and staggering, down the trail to the little cove.



Gray Flash, with a snarl of rage and fear, leaped away from the dead calf as Shag lunged madly at him; then he scrambled to the top of the basalt cliff, where, safe from the mighty horns, he squatted, and with lips curled back from fangs still dripping with the blood of his victim, looked down in disappointed fury on the massive bulk of the gaunt K-Bar steer standing over the slaughtered offspring of Red One and the Roan Bull.

Shag smelled the warm blood, yet he made no sound. His eyes gleamed with a new light, and he stood rigid and silent and waited.

The nose of Gray Flash pointed in the air, and the shrill, keen howl of the hunt rolled in quivering ripples of sound across the slopes of Capaline, over the dim Llano de Gato, and echoed through the cañons of Del Christo range. Crooked Fang, the ferocious, the leader of the pack, far up the Purgatory, heard the howl of Gray Flash, and knew the young wolf bayed the great, golden-brown steer that stood so often and alone on the slopes of Capaline.

The time had come.

Then Crooked Fang, the king himself, stretched wide his muzzle while the long, curved tusks gleamed in the moonlight, sent out the slow, terrifying, far-flung cry that would bring together his greatest hunters.

Three times the call was repeated. Like the wailing of souls, lost and damned and in torment, came back the answers. Some from the near-by crags of Del Christo range; some from beyond the Cimmaron; some from the grassy slopes of Sentinel Mountain; and still others, faintly, from out of the depths of the blanket of shadow that lay over the Llano de Gato.

After that Crooked Fang loped swiftly, eagerly, to the place of the kill.

Shag, too, heard the call of the master-wolf, and the answers—drawing nearer, always nearer—that rolled back out of the night. And he knew. Yet, even so, he made no sound. Silent, in his mad eyes the delirium and passion to kill; the rough hair of his back ridged with the tingling lust of battle; his mighty neck arched; the great head held low and tensely alert; he

stood over the limp, motionless body of Red One's calf and waited. Once only did he lift up his voice. When the pack was ready—when the score or more of gaunt, shadowy forms had closed in a tight circle about the little cove, and Crooked Fang stretched up his grizzled head, and the hoarse, deep-toned howl of attack poured from his widespread jaws, then, and then only, did Shag answer. One long, vibrating trumpetlike bellow roared from his mighty throat, and in it was the challenge of undying hate and defiance and rage. It was no call to his own kind for help—he had lived alone—he would fight alone—he would die alone!

Crooked Fang's veterans, impatient for the slaughter, closed with their victim.

Shag met them. Twenty to one were the odds—besides the young ones. Yet Shag, the great, drug-crazed, K-Bar steer, dissipated, dissolute, depraved, despised by his own kin, battled with them all!

Sharp teeth slashed at the sinews of his legs; frenzied creatures, the mad glare of hunger and hate and fear in their eyes, the blood-foam drooling from their jaws, leaped and leaped again and yet again for his throat. Crooked Fang himself sprang time after time—now for the jugular, now the flank, again at the shrunken haunches—and always the snap of his strong teeth, the teeth that made him master of the pack, was followed by the sickening rip of flesh and hide.

Bleeding from a hundred wounds, Shag fought them all.

His breath came in torturing explosions; blood oozed from his mouth and nose; his eyes blazed with implacable hatred, with the fierce wild joy of battle.

Twice the death howl sounded above the snarling confusion as the black tip of a mighty horn found the vitals of a gray devil; one Shag crushed into a lifeless mass under his front feet; Gray Flash leaped for the flank of the great steer—an ironlike hoof shot out and Gray Flash, with a broken back, rolled against the bottom of the basalt cliff!

Keen fangs at last whittled through the sinews of the gaunt hind legs—his knees gave way—and with a helpless lurch Shag's

loins sunk to the ground. Still he fought, lashing desperately, right and left with the great horns, his body swaying in futile efforts to rise. With a howl of triumph Crooked Fang, master of the pack—greedy for the kill—leaped in and fastened his teeth in the jugular of the still unconquered victim. With a supreme burst of courage—by his strong will alone, almost—Shag staggered to his feet, the giant head swung up, the King of the Loafers was lifted high in the air as the teeth tore from their hold on the throat of the K-Bar steer, and the hot blood gushed like a fountain of death from the ragged wound—for one instant Crooked Fang sprawled on the ground—quick as the lightning flash a mighty horn drove through the entrails of the ferocious, the cunning one and pinned his writhing, dying body to the earth.

Never again would Crooked Fang send out the call to the hunt!

When the first red flush of morning spread over the crest of Capaline, the dead volcano, Shag fell, and under his breast was the calf of Red One—avenged.

There it was, between the basalt cliff and the edge of the Purgatory. Mateo Sandoza, the wood-gatherer, came, six days later, and found the clean stripped bones of the Great Steer, what was left also of the small calf, and the skeletons of the five wolves, yet Mateo, dreaming of love, saw only the wealth the beautiful horns would bring, and by which he and Nanita, the wonderful one, she with the dark eyes, the

slender body, and the lips—would be able to go to the padre. He knew not that it was the horns of Shag, the degenerate, the pariah—he who had yielded to the loco, the plant diablo—chopped by his ax from the fleshless skull. Nor do those who admire them, to this day, in the cantina La Baca, know.

Yet, later, weeks afterward, another came to the little cove.

The Red One having escaped, after being driven far beyond the border by the rustlers, came again to the Llano de Gato, tired and worn thin by the journey—for the sands of Mexico burn the feet and grass is scarce and but little water may be found—yet she returned—and there, in the little cove she found the bones; the skull of Shag, and though the lizards now play over it, and the centipedes take refuge under it, when paisano—the road-runner—passes that way—she, the Red One, mourned piteously!

Though the beautiful horns were gone; though no flesh covered the white, crumbling shell in which one time dwelt the tortured brain of Shag—who shall say the Red One did not know?

Or who can say that the soul of Shag—the great K-Bar steer—purified, perhaps, by the manner of his death, glorified, it may be by his courage at the end—did not see the sorrow of Red One and rejoice in it—finding in her grief the promise that some time, somewhere, in the endless whirl of eternity, they, too, may meet again.

THIS **123<sup>rd</sup>** ALL-STORY WEEKLY SERIAL TO  
IS THE **123<sup>rd</sup>** BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM

## THE FLYING LEGION

BY GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND

*Author of "Cursed," "The Gift Supreme," "Darkness and Dawn," "The Ahbi," etc.*

WHAT better companion and guide than George Allan England could one have on a vicarious trip into the golden land of romance? His work breathes the very spirit of adventure, his imagination knows no boundaries. In this new story he takes us on a venturesome quest into the heart of the great desert of Arabia, perhaps the most unknown of any large territory on old earth's surface. What happens from the moment that the gallant members of the Flying Legion soar into the sky above New York in their giant airplane will give you several hours of entertaining and exciting reading. (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, November 15 to December 20, 1910.)

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# Bing, Bang, Boom!

by Raymond Leslie Goldman.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE BROKEN IDOL.

"TO tell you the truth, Boom," Turner replied slowly, "I don't know what you're talking about. I'll admit I had Blake with me at the dance because I didn't have any idea what a—"

"Never mind the explanations," Bert cut in. "I know all about it. I know who Blake—or Paprika—was, and how he came to Selma, and everything else connected with the whole dirty business. Now put up your hands, because I'm going to begin right now."

Turner shrugged, and dropped his hands to his sides.

"I haven't any desire to fight with you, Boom. If you have any charges to make against me, you'd better go to the proper authorities, and—"

"Put up your hands!" cried Bert, breathing hard. "Put them up, and defend yourself, you yellow, cowardly cur!"

Turner did not move, his arms still hanging, defenseless, at his sides, his shrewd eyes squarely meeting Bert's hot gaze.

"I prefer not to fight you," he said quietly.

Bert hesitated. He shrank from hitting a man who would make no attempt to defend himself; and yet he knew that it was just that upon which Turner was counting to save himself from the beating he merited.

"You're such a despicable cur," he said contemptuously, "that no man can treat you as he'd treat another *man*. But you're going to get your licking, anyway, even if it isn't a man's licking."

He took a step forward and brought down his open palm across Turner's cheek. With a gasp, Turner swayed to the left; but Bert's left palm was ready, and its stinging open-handed blow sent Turner staggering to the right again. Again and again he swung his hard-stretched palms across Turner's cheeks, and when Turner, in frantic desperation, sought to shield his battered face with crossed arms, Bert played a resounding tattoo on his ribs.

Bert had not once clenched his fists, so his blows were not seriously damaging; but, withal, they were very painful, and Turner finally dropped weakly to his knees, where he crouched in terror.

Turner's ignominious thrashing did not require much more time for its accomplishment than it takes to tell of it, for Bert's lithe arms in action attained the bewildering speed of an automatic riveter.

At the first sharp sound of Bert's blows, Turner's workmen, who had moved away to some distance, came running to the scene of the conflict, and now, as Turner sank to his knees and Bert stooped over him, ready to yank him again to his feet, they were at hand.

"Help!" shouted Turner, hearing their approach. "Take him off! Hold him!"

"What's up?" demanded one of the men who was in the lead of the others.

"Hold him!" Turner repeated frantically. "He—he's crazy!"

The man looked at Turner's purple, swollen face, and then up at Bert. Before he could ask his question, Bert answered him.

"I'm just giving this dog an open-handed licking," he explained. "I'm not nearly through yet, so stand back. It takes longer to do a good job when you can't close your fists; and I can't use my fists on him because he won't fight back like a man. Watch!"

As he spoke, he reached down and caught Turner by the scuff of the neck and, with an upward heave, brought him to his feet; then his hand went flying outward again, and Turner was sent reeling back into the midst of the men behind him. A thin stream of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth.

"Great God!" screamed Turner, looking wildly to his men. "Why—don't you—do something? Hold him! Beat him! That's it—beat him! I'll fix it all right—with all of you—if you—beat him."

"Why don't you do it yerself?" sneered the man who seemed to be the foreman. "You ain't no cripple, an' the kid's fightin' fair." He directed his gaze over and beyond Bert, toward the clearing. "Here comes a bunch. Maybe they'll take up your dirty offer!"

The "bunch" to which he referred was the Selma Board of Selectmen, Sheriff Warren and Ruth, who had driven into the clearing a moment before, and were now hastening across the field to the scene of the unusual combat.

They had arrived in time to see how fairly Bert had fought his battle with Turner, scorning the use of his fists on the coward; they had heard Turner's loathsome offer to his men, and had perceived the scorn with which it was received.

Now, as they joined the group of workmen surrounding Turner and Bert, even the lips of Cass Bidwell were curled with utter contempt.

Turner had dropped to his knees again. He knew that Bert would not strike him if he was not standing. In his frenzy of

physical terror he did not realize the ignominy of his position; he did not realize, as did Cass Bidwell, that he was a fallen idol, a broken, shattered idol that could never rise again. Kneeling there, his fear so abject that it shook his body and set his lips to whimpering, he realized only that the coming of these men, with Sheriff Warren among them, might bring him protection.

"For God's sake, sheriff," he cried, passing his shaking hand across his bloody lips, "get that—lunatic! He—he's trying to—murder me!"

"Yes; arrest him!" echoed Bidwell, glowering upon Bert. "Arrest him, sheriff!"

Bert turned to face the sheriff. Ruth was standing at his side, but Bert seemed not to let his gaze include her as he addressed her father.

"I haven't finished with this whining puppy yet," he said, indicating Turner; "but if you've come to take me back, I'll finish it some other time."

For a moment Warren was silent. He looked at Turner, at Bert, and, finally, straight into the eyes of Cass Bidwell. His hand fumbled to his breast under his coat, and then he extended his hand, with the sheriff's star lying in its palm.

"I reckon I'm through here, Cass," he said quietly. "I ain't makin' no more arrests."

"You mean to say you—you're quitting?" sputtered Bidwell. He felt as if the world were slipping from under his feet. Turner crawling on his knees; the sheriff following the disastrous example of Noah Spigot; and the Board of Selectmen there to see it all!

"I'm quittin'," Warren affirmed steadily. "I'm through sharin' in the crookedness of Ellis Turner an' you, an' everybuddy Turner's made to work fer 'im."

"All right then," Bidwell shouted in a sudden rage engendered by his helplessness, snatching the glittering star from Warren's palm and dropping it into his pocket. "Hand over your gun, Warren. I'll make this here arrest myself."

"I didn't bring no gun," said Warren. "I got no right to carry it, 'cause I been

jest the same as resigned ever since last night."

"Ah!" said Bert, looking grimly at Bidwell. "You'll have to make this arrest with more than your trigger-finger, Bidwell. I was figuring on taking you on next, anyway. When I get through with you, you're going to tell us what you know about that fire in my hotel the other night. If you want to take off your coat, go to it, because I'm ready to begin."

Bidwell did not pause to remove his coat. Without a moment's hesitation, he rushed at Bert, who backed away warily, sizing up his man as he circled about him.

"You should have taken off your coat," said Bert evenly, "because you'll find it kind of warm in a minute. I'm glad you're not like the puppy you've been calling Boss. I can use my fists on you!"

He stepped in, feinted for Bidwell's bulging jaw with his right, and when the president threw up his guard, ripped a sizzling left to the man's midriff. Bidwell's breath went from him in a heavy grunt, his arms went down; and Bert streamed rights and lefts into the unprotected face.

Bidwell went down; but he was up again in a moment and, with an ugly oath on his lips, rushed into a clinch.

For several moments the men swayed back and forth, locked in a straining embrace; then they went crashing together to the ground, with the heavier Bidwell on top.

As soon as Bidwell had wrapped his arms about him, Bert knew that he had met a worthy foe. The man's muscles were like steel, and his rage invested him with added strength. But he realized, too, that Bidwell's methods were crude; that his knowledge of wrestling was as inadequate as his knowledge of boxing.

It was not difficult to preconceive the actions of such an opponent; and as Bert fell, with Bidwell on top of him, he waited unstruggling, for Bidwell to do the expected thing; to withdraw one hand from beneath his prostrate foe for the purpose of finishing the battle with his fist.

To the breathless watchers of the struggle, though, the battle seemed to be about ended, with Bidwell victorious. Ruth War-

ren read the verdict in their gloomy faces and heavy silence, and her throat tightened with a sudden, inexplicable sorrow.

"Oh—Bert!" she called softly, a sob lying over her words.

He heard her, and a thrill of happiness tingled through him. Because love is bitter-sweet, sometimes a cup of honey, sometimes a cup of gall, man has come to fear it, even as he yearns for it, and he will acknowledge that it has conquered him only after he has struggled long against it.

Now, as Bert lay there, in that moment while he waited for Bidwell to lift his fist above him, the full realization that he loved Ruth came to him. There was no fear of love in his heart now. She had called him *Bert!*

Bidwell raised himself a trifle, withdrew his right hand from beneath Bert's back, and clenched his fist to strike. But the intended blow never fell. With a quickness that revealed Bert's preparedness, Bert's hand reached upward and grasped the up-raised wrist; and, with a howl of pain, Bidwell rolled from Bert's chest and lay groaning and clasp ing his twisted wrist, while Bert jumped to his feet.

"Now," said Bert grimly, standing above Bidwell; "are you ready to tell us about that little fire—or do you want some more?"

Discretion should have been the better part of Bidwell's valor just then. Bert's wrist-lock had left his right hand a useless weapon, and already Bert's fists had worked havoc with his face. But Bidwell's rage knew no reason. He scrambled unsteadily to his feet and rushed again at Bert. And then the battering began. When it was finished, Bidwell lay again at Bert's feet, blubbing, blood-streaming, with only a glimmer of consciousness left to him.

Bert leaned over him, panting heavily from the exertion of hitting and hitting again.

"Now," he repeated, "are you ready to tell us about that little fire—or do you want some more?"

"Turner," Bidwell whispered—"Turner—started it—"

"And why did Spigot leave office?" asked Bert. "What was the *real* reason?"

"I—don't—know," Bidwell replied faintly. "So help me—God—I—don't."

Bert straightened and wheeled about to face Turner, who had again risen to his feet. But at Bert's alarming approach, his fear overcame him, his knees sagged beneath him, and he knelt again.

"Gentlemen," said Bert, turning to the startled members of Selma's Board of Selectmen, "you see before you the two exalted leaders of Selma's affairs—the two masters you've been serving so faithfully. I'm going to give them just until to-morrow morning to get out of town, and if they're still here then, I'm going to give your tin god, Turner, another open-handed licking—which is the most honorable licking I can give him—and your esteemed president another *real* one.

"I don't believe that any of you realized what sort of men you were serving so blindly; but if there are any of you who were actually mixed up in their wrong-doings, why—why, you'd better resign to-night. There's going to be a general overhauling in this town, I promise you; and any one who hasn't been straight doesn't want to be here while it's going on."

"Those of us as knows they're innercent are willin' to stand fer any kind of investigation," spoke up Selectman Diggers, coming forward. "Fer myself, I been livin' in Selma fer th' past twenty-nine year, an' there ain't a man to say a word ag'in' me, neither. I think I kin speak fer th' rest of us, too. There ain't a one of us as wasn't kind o' suspicious, o' Cass Bidwell and Ellis Turner, ever since we begun to hear things last night." He paused and looked around at his colleagues, who nodded their heads solemnly in collaboration.

"All right, gentlemen," said Bert. "I meant no offense to any of you, and if there's no reason for it, you won't take any."

"There ain't no offense," assured Diggers. "We understand."

Bert looked around. Warren was still standing among the circled group, but Ruth had left. A second glance revealed her, walking rapidly across the field toward the clearing and her waiting buggy.

"Impress it upon these rats that they're

to leave town by to-morrow morning," said Bert, addressing the men collectively. "Good day, gentlemen." And he strode away, toward the clearing—and Ruth.

She had already reached her buggy and had climbed to the seat when Bert overtook her.

He took his stand beside her, between the wheels of the vehicle.

"Ruth," he said abruptly, "I want to talk to you a minute."

"Ruth," she echoed. "How—how dare you, Mr. Boom!"

"You called me 'Bert,'" he replied.

She flushed scarlet. "I—I don't remember it."

"I do," said Bert, nursing his bruised fists as he spoke. "I'll never forget it as long as I live. At that moment, Ruth, I became convinced of something I hadn't quite realized before; of something I didn't *dare* realize before, I should say. And that is that I love you—and want you!"

"Oh!" she quavered. "You don't know what you're saying! You know that it's impossible! You—you said—"

"I'll never think that any more," he replied quickly. "When you called me 'Bert,' you told me that it *wasn't* impossible. You know why I've avoided you all this time! It was because I—I didn't understand. I see now that I was all wrong, and that the—third thing—isn't impossible, after all. I'd take you now—to-day—if I could; but first"—he pointed to the Majestic Hotel—"first, I have to make something of that piece of junk there on the hill. I'm going to do that—and then I'm coming for you!"

Quite as suddenly as he had approached her, he stepped back from between the wheels of her buggy and walked away, his long strides carrying him swiftly up the bending road toward his hotel.

For a moment she sat still, gazing steadily and unseeingly into the green-brown foliage of the lane ahead, as if his mad words, his weird declaration of love, had robbed her of all animation. At length she reached for her reins and mechanically urged her horse forward.

"He—he must be crazy," she murmured with quivering lips. "N-no man would

t-talk that way to a g-girl if he wasn't—crazy!"

But, somehow, though she was trembling with what she knew must be rage, though her eyes were blurred and her throat strangely tight with what she knew must be righteous indignation, the heart within her sang.

"I'm going to do that," it sang to her; "I'm going to do that—and then I'm coming for you!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A WORD TO THE WISE.

**A**T four o'clock the following afternoon, Bert drove to the railroad-station and found David Hodge in the waiting-room. He was reading a book, following the lines with a long, bony forefinger, and he did not look up when Bert entered and crossed the room to where he was sitting. Bert seated himself upon the bench facing him, and waited, with growing impatience, for the station-master to acknowledge his presence.

"It looks like rain again," said Bert finally. "I noticed it was clouding up in the west."

David grunted, without lifting his eyes from the book.

"I suppose we'll have a lot of rain all this month, won't we?" Bert tried again.

Still David made no move to signify that he was aware of Bert's presence. Bert bit his lip.

"Of course," said Bert hotly, rising to his feet, "if you don't want to talk to me, I'll be going along. I had some business to talk to you about, but—"

David looked up and closed his book.

"Wait a minute, son," he called; for Bert had already started toward the door. "Were you wantin' to see me?"

Bert whirled about. "Hang it all, David! Why can't you be ordinarily civil for once in your life? There's such a thing as carrying things to extremes, you know, and—"

"Son," asked David, "did you ever hear of Willy Shakespeare? Ever read 'Macbeth'?"

Bert walked back to the bench, and dropped into it again.

"Of course I've read it," he replied gruffly. "What about it?"

"Well, which do you think is the most interestin': the murder scene in 'Macbeth,' or a couple o' remarks about the weather?"

Bert hit his palm with his fist. "Well, what's the answer?"

"That's what I was askin' you," said David. "Anyways, I was readin' 'Macbeth' when you come in jest a while ago."

"You were!" exclaimed Bert.

David nodded, a smile playing at the corners of his mouth.

"I wonder," he said slowly, "who is the most uncivil—you or me? I'm a plain man, and I ain't got much manners; you're the kind o' feller who kin sit at table an' use the right fork for the salad. Well, you call me uncivil b'cause I found 'Macbeth' a leetle more interestin' than some remarks you made regardin' the weather, which didn't have no more to do with what you come to see me about than a talk about plug hats.

"I was jest aimin' to stick to good liter-choor till you circled round the house a couple o' times and then knocked at the front door. You, on the other hand, look real surprised 'cause I told you I was readin' a book that you admitted you read yourself. In other words, you jest the same as come right out an' told me you didn't think I had brains enough to read or understand what was in a good book. Is that jest polite, now?"

Bert dropped his eyes to his shoes, an uncomfortable warmth rising to his ears.

"Why, really, David, I didn't—"

"Whenever a man is about to say somethin' that ain't jest exactly so, he begins it with: 'Why, really.' The only good liar is the man who kin say his lie in such a way that nobuddy kin connect it with any other lie they ever heard."

"Listen, David: You've got the idea that I don't like you, and think you're only good enough for me to wipe my feet on. That's wrong. I'll admit that up to a short time ago you had me guessing. I didn't know if you were wonderfully brilliant, or if you were just naturally loony. Well, I've made

up my mind now, and far from being surprised that you are reading 'Macbeth,' I don't believe I'd be surprised if I had heard you'd *written* it."

If David was pleased at this sincerely spoken compliment, he did not show it. He flung one knee across the other, and, taking one of his long, black cheroots from his pocket, began to chew upon it thoughtfully.

"You want me to get straight to the point," went on Bert, "so that's what I'm going to do. I came to see you to find out if you can help me to get the Majestic going again."

"H-m!" said David. "What do you need help fer now, son? Now that you've cleaned out Turner—o' course you know that him an' Bidwell left on the 6.20 this mornin'—an' got the Board o' Seelectmen to revoke that there power-house franchise, why don't you go ahead with your rest-resort idear? You seemed purty fond o' that jest t'other day."

"You made me lose faith in it, David," Bert replied. "I've been talking it over with Fred all day, and—and it doesn't look so good to us now. I'm afraid it could never become a big thing."

"An' so you come to me," said David; "you finally come to me. The lion goes an' claws up durn near all o' Selma, an' then he gits tangled up in the net, an' can't move hand nor foot. Harder you pull, the tighter it draws, eh?"

"That's about the size of it. I'm tangled up, good and proper. I've borrowed ten thousand dollars on my property, and then I've sunk it into the place, for repairs. And I can't see my way out, David."

"What makes you think I kin help you?" David asked.

"Because you've hinted again and again that you could," replied Bert, "only I didn't trust you until lately, David. I—I couldn't understand you."

"I guess you've been told all about my pussonal hist'ry, ain't you?" inquired David. "The story of my life, so to speak?"

"Yes; I—"

"I thought so," said David. "My friends like to talk about me jest like most

folks like to talk about a operation. It gives 'em jest enough pain in the tellin' to make it kinder pleasant. Folks as had a lot o' trouble, or know about a lot o' troubles that others has had, never find themselves wantin' fer somethin' to talk about. I reckon they told you that I used to weigh considerable more than I do now?"

"Yes; and—"

"Anybuddy to hear all about me—how I lost all my money an' even my datter, Emma—anybuddy to hear about that 'd likely calc'late that worry is a great flesh-reducer, wouldn't they? Folks must've told you I got thin like this from worryin'. Funny thing about it is that I don't b'lieve in worryin' over what's happened no more'n I b'lieve in a man keepin' on a-diggin' a knife in hisself jest b'cause he was stabbed once. I reckon I worried a mite once—especially jest after Emma ran away from me—but not hardly enough to git rid of a hundred pounds o' fat."

"You've been very sick, David?"

"Sick? Well, folks hereabouts like to think o' me as a sick man, an' I ain't the kind to deny nobuddy a leetle harmless pleasure. Folks meet me on the street an' say: 'Feelin' purty *bad* agin, David?' An' if I say: 'No; I'm feelin' fust rate,' they look so surprised they're almost *disappointed*. So I jest learned to say: 'Tol'rable'—which they take as meanin' half-dead, an' everybuddy's more satisfied."

"Truth is, though, I been feelin' better 'n' stronger since I weigh one-twenty than when I weighed two-twenty. A *skinny* man don't *look* so healthy, mebbe, but he ain't got the ailin's a fat man's got. At that, I reckon I wouldn't look so bad if I could afford to buy nice clothes an' things."

"If it wasn't from sickness an' it wasn't from worry," said Bert, "what made you get thin?"

"That's the question fat people 'd give millions o' dollars to git the answer of," replied David. "I uster spend a pile o' money myself trying to git rid o' some o' my fat. Why, I used to go up to the springs up-State every year fer a while to take them baths an' try to reduce. An' I was jest one of thousands. But it didn't do me much good. I'd sweat off ten pounds



for so, an' in two weeks I'd git it back—  
*plus*. Ever visited any o' the springs around  
this 'part o' the country, son?"

Bert shook his head. "Since I came  
here, I haven't had time to visit springs."

"This State's full of 'em," said David.  
"There's springs that 're so hot that they  
jest *bile* the ailments out'n you, an' springs  
that 're so cold they jest *freeze* 'em out.  
jest *bile* the ailments out'n you, an' springs  
fer gout, an' springs fer dyspepsia, an'  
springs fer every other durn thing you kin  
think of." He paused. "You didn't fix  
up the back part o' the Majestic, did you,  
son?"

"The back part? What do you mean?"

"The grounds in the back," David ex-  
plained.

"No; I didn't get to that," Bert replied.  
"I wasn't going to fix it up much. It's nicer  
just growing wild that way. All I intended  
doing was to fix up the paths a bit, and lay  
out a couple of tennis-courts."

"They're beautiful grounds, all right,"  
agreed David, "jest as they are. I used  
to be gardener there a long time ago, as  
you must 'a' heard, an' I know every foot  
o' the ground. One spot in partic'lar I  
kinder had a fondness fer. 'Tain't much to  
look at, I reckon, what with them dead tree-  
trunks a-layin' there, an' dead branches  
piled up. But ever since that mornin', eight  
or ten year ago, when I fust come on that  
there spot, suddenlike, I kinder liked it.

"Every chance I'd git away from work,  
I'd make fer the northeast corner o' the  
grounds, passin' the leetle rustic summer-  
house, an' then turnin' to the left till I come  
to that big maple with the funny, twisted  
branch. I used to love to lie under that  
there tree, listenin' to the water bubblin'  
jest to the right o' me. My secret spot, I  
used to call it—not carin' fer anybuddy to  
know what a nice place it was."

He paused and rose slowly to his feet,  
stretching himself. "I won't keep you no  
longer, son. Reckon it must be nigh onto  
five o'clock, an' you'll be wantin' to take a  
leetle drive b'fore supper time. Can't blame  
you fer preferrin' it to listenin' to me. Come  
in an' see me again, some time."

Bert rose, too, and stood, hesitant, watch-  
ing David as he disappeared into an inner

room. He knew that David's message had  
been given; that David, despite the appar-  
ent triteness of his remarks, considered it  
information of the greatest importance.

But what had David told him? In what  
way could those seemingly unrelated stories  
be pieced together to solve the problem of  
the Majestic's revival? Of one thing only  
was Bert certain. David wanted him to  
drive out to the hotel, to find out a rustic  
summer-house in the rear of the building, to  
turn, then, to the left, until he came upon  
a big maple with strangely gnarled  
branches.

As he left the station, he called "Good-  
by, David;" but there came no answer.  
David, perched on the high stool before the  
telegraph desk, had returned to the inter-  
rupted murder scene of *Macbeth*.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE "ATTRACTION."

**I**T is as often in the byways as on the  
highways of life that men find fortune  
strolling alone and willing to be courted.  
The plodder, wearied by a day at routine  
toil, seeks to forget the tribute of drudgery  
that the morrow will demand by working  
for an hour on an idea.

And, lo! The idea of fortune, waiting  
for him there in the by-path. The pros-  
pector, his body arch-bent with years over  
pick and shovel, his face haggard with dis-  
illusionment, the taste of life to him like  
sand between the teeth, turns from his  
worthless claim at last, and finds gold at  
the bed of the rushing stream in which  
he sought to die.

Even so, Bert, breaking his way through  
the tangled undergrowth of the two acres  
of woodland that lay in the rear of the  
Majestic, finding out the little rustic sum-  
mer-house that seemed a very part of the  
tanglewood, pausing at last beneath a maple  
tree, one great bow of which was gnarled  
and knotted and barren in its dead deform-  
ity—even so, in this unexpected spot Bert  
found Fortune at his side, smiling upon  
him with a smile that was literally golden.

When he reached the tree that was, un-  
mistakably, the object of his quest, he

stopped and looked about him. He had come thus far not without misgivings. He could not entirely throw aside his suspicions of the unusual station-master; he could not rid himself of the uneasy thought that this was but another sample of David's so-called humor, and that David was even now chuckling merrily over this foolish, futile errand.

All about him the fallen leaves, brown and crisp and curled, made a crackling carpet for the unplanted forest-floor. Twigs and broken branches lay strewn about. To the right of him the branches were piled high—stacked with a studied carelessness that impressed him.

David had mentioned that. He listened in the solemn forest-stillness, for he remembered that David had said that he used to lie there "listenin' to the water bubblin' jest to the right o' me." The sound that came to him was unmistakable, despite its faintness. He heard it, too: the soft murmur of bubbling water, like the gentle dribbling of a leaky faucet.

With eager hands he tore away the stack of twigs and branches; then he stood back, gazing with wide eyes into the small excavation that he laid bare. It was like a great, cracked cup, hewn out from solid rock. And through its crevices the water bubbled, trickling down its sides to form a clear pool at its bottom—a pool that must have seeped out at the bottom as mysteriously as it bubbled into the top, for it rose no higher despite its constant accretion.

With a low cry Bert dropped to his knees, made a dipper of his palm, and brought some of the clear water to his lips. Its pungent taste screwed his face into a grimace.

For a moment he knelt there, staring into the pool, the sudden, overwhelming joy that rose within him threatening to dissolve itself into tears of sheer happiness. Now he knew why David had spoken of springs! He recalled his every word.

Springs for dyspepsia! Springs for gout! Springs for rheumatism! Springs for almost every ailment to which man is subjected!

What property had this spring—his

spring? He did not know; he did not care. It was a *spring*, and that was quite enough.

With a frantic haste that verged upon hysteria, throwing back his head to let his tremulous laughter ring through the canopy of boughs above him, stumbling, scattering the complaining leaves and snapping twigs beneath his bounding feet, he made his joyful way to the front of the Majestic, where he had left his horse and buggy.

He drove madly, shouting and slapping the reins until the horse was quite as excited as his master. When they reached Main Street the animal was galloping, splashing through the puddles that last night's rain had left, coating its legs and belly with wet mud.

People on the sidewalks stared after the shouting young man, shaking their heads solemnly.

"There goes that Bing, Bang, Boom," they said portentously; and found no need to supplement this statement.

Bert drove directly to the station. David was standing in the doorway, gazing out into the gathering dusk. In a moment Bert was out of his buggy, across the platform, and had caught the man in his arms, hugging him to his breast.

"David!" he cried, releasing him and drawing back a pace. "David, you old son-of-a-gun! I've found it! I've found the spring!"

David rubbed his chin and regarded the excited young man seriously.

"Looks like somethin' might 'a' bit you out there, too," he replied. "What did you do—roll home? You're full o' mud."

"Splashed up," said Bert. "David, dog-gone you, I found the spring!"

"I thought you might," David remarked. "Springs don't usually walk away. Now that you found it, what're you goin' to do with it?"

"I'm going to make a million dollars!" cried Bert. "That's what I'm going to do! It's a mineral spring. I tasted it. It's just like those you were telling me about. What does *this* one cure, David?"

David shook his head sadly. "You're as thick-headed as a marble stachoo, son. I told you, and now you don't know."

"But you—"

"That there spring," David went on, "is the one I used to drink from when I was a gardener at the Majestic. You know what I was then, an' you know what I am now, an'—"

"David!" shouted Bert, throwing his arms into the air. "It makes *fat* people *thin*!"

"Son," said David dryly, "you ought to go on the stage, you're such a wonderful mind-reader! That's what it does. That there water 'll take off from three to five pounds o' fat a week." He paused. "Let's go inside an' sit down."

Dazedly, Bert followed the station-master into the dusk-pervaded waiting-room. David pulled a pendant chain, and the light above sprang out and routed the murk. They seated themselves, facing each other.

"David," said Bert, calm now in the face of the glorious truth, "it's the most wonderful thing I ever heard. Within a week after the news of it gets around, the Majestic will be crowded to the doors; and if I had ten hotels—twenty hotels—like it, they'd all be filled. Why, every fat person would give a fortune to get thin."

David grunted. "I told you somethin' on that order b'fore."

"Just to think," said Bert, thoughtfully, "that you knew this secret all these years and couldn't say anything! Why didn't you try to get money somewhere and buy the place from Turner yourself?"

"You can't git fifteen or twenty thousand dollars jest 'somewheres,' son. Mebbe I could 'a' tried to borrry it on the strength o' knowin' o' that spring, but I'd have to *tell* the secret fust—an' then, most likely, I'd git *nothin*."

"But you told *me*!"

"U-m! So I did."

Bert leaned forward and caught the station-master's rough hand, pressing it between his own.

"David, why did you tell me? Why have you helped me ever since I came here? You kept me away from that dance that night, and I realize now that it was best that I didn't go. You got me out of jail—saved me from the penitentiary, just as sure as I'm sitting here. I don't know how you could have done it, but you *did*! You

let me fight my own battles most of the time so as to help make a man of me, but—and I'm just aware of it now for the first time—you were always behind me, ready to help me out. And now you've told me this wonderful secret. Why have you done all this for me, David?"

"Son," David returned slowly, "a long time ago when I was a young man, I bought a leetle farm an' decided to make farmin' my profession, so to speak. Well, I didn't know anythin' about farmin' at that time, b'cause I'd spent the most o' my life b'fore that workin' in the coal-mines down in Oklahoma, an' I wasn't havin' much success with my crops right off.

"Well, one day a man come ridin' past an' he drops off at my house to git a bite to eat, an' afterward he takes a look over my leetle farm. That there feller knew a lot about farmin', an' he seen right off that I had a fertile piece of land, but I wasn't farmin' it right. So he stays on with me a week, puttin' me straight about things, an' showin' me how to make a big success of it.

"Nacherly, I asked him why he helped me the way he did—jest like you asked me—an' he says: 'Young man,' he says, 'my hobby is farms an' farmin'. I know enough about it so's I kin tell a good piece o' land from a bad piece; an' when I see a good piece bein' worked the wrong way, I like to make my knowledge of some use. When I see that I've made things grow where they wasn't growin' b'fore—even if the land ain't mine an' it's nothin' in my pocket—why, my payment,' he says, 'is the satisfaction o' knowin' that my judgment o' that there land was correct.'" David paused. "My hobby," he told Bert, "is human nature."

Bert flushed gratefully. "And you've certainly kept me from being a failure, David. Now that I look back upon it, I realize how much I've learned from you since I came to Selma. I haven't made use of it yet, but I surely will in the future. I'm not going to forget what you've done for me, David. Now's the time for me to show those who've helped me how grateful I am. You—and Fred Patterson, David. Fred's been the best friend to me that a

man ever had. He's worked for me as hard as he could have worked for himself. And now—now the three of us are together, David. I'll split the Majestic stock three ways—and each of us gets a third."

"I don't want none of it, son," David answered softly. "Jest like that feller who helped me with my farm, my payment is knowin' that you are what I jedged you to be as soon as I saw you. I don't want none of it."

"I don't care what you want," Bert retorted. "You'll get it! And so will Fred."

"How about Ruth?" asked David, his eyes twinkling.

"Ruth?" Bert repeated, as if the very name awed him.

"If I ain't mistaken," added David, "she did a heap to keep you bingin' an' bangin' around here. When a man don't love no woman, son, he's like to git discouraged an' turn back if a ant-hill is a lay-in' in his path; but if he loves a woman, he don't stop if the Rocky Mountains is standin' b'tween him an' her. I wouldn't be a bit surprised if Dan'l went into the lion's den b'cause some woman happened to ask him to.

"Y'know, that leetle chubby feller with the bow 'n' arrows is the greatest magician that ever was. He kin make a wise man out'n a fool an' a fool out'n a wise man, give a weak feller strength, an' make a strong feller weak. There ain't nothin' he can't do.

"You say I helped you, an' Fred helped you, son; but you ain't givin' the credit where the credit b'longs. If 'twasn't fer that there leetle naked critter with the curly hair, you'd 'a' binged an' banged in, an' mebbe binged an' banged out—but you wouldn't 'a' stayed so long."

"But, David," Bert protested, his face hot with embarrassment, "Ruth Warren and I don't even speak. She—she hasn't said a pleasant word to me as long as—"

David interrupted him with a wink.

"When a man loves a woman, son, her scorn is more inspirin' than her love in return. I wonder," he added, squinting through one eye and rubbing his chin sagely—"I wonder if Ruth don't know that!

Well, you'd better be gittin' back to town, an' tell Fred the news. You two'll have some plannin' to do, I reckon."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### PREPARATIONS.

AT nine thirty that evening, Bert and Fred were still seated in *The Punch* office; by that time, settled down to sober discussion. As it had before, when they were making their plans for the Majestic, the most serious problem that now confronted them was a lack of capital. They saw the necessity of waging an extensive advertising campaign; and such a campaign would cost money—a great deal of it.

"I tell you what I'll do," said Fred. "You offered me an interest in the place, and I refused it. I still refuse it. But I've saved up about five thousand dollars, and if you're willing, I'll invest it in the hotel. Five thousand ought to just about see us through."

"And I have twenty-five hundred left," said Bert. "That makes—"

"We can't count on that. You can't open the place without any capital on hand. You still have food to buy and servants of all kinds to hire—and it takes money. Why, you'll be surprised to see how much there is to be done before you can get started. For one thing, you'll have to fix up the back grounds a bit—lay out nice walks, and make the spring bigger.

"You can't have every one dropping to their knees and drinking the way you said you did. That 'll all have to be piped and made into a sort of drinking fountain; and it really ought to be enclosed in a building of some sort. Why, you'll find that you've a hundred things to do, and, believe me, it takes money! I doubt that even my five thousand will be enough."

"It's impossible to get another loan?"

"Of course. But, say," Fred suggested, "you have a rich father. Now that you're sure of success, why not ask him to lend you—"

Bert shook his head. "Nothing doing. I'd get it, all right, but I swore I'd never

go to dad for money under any circumstances. When he hears from me I'll have twenty thousand dollars that I can show him. Rather than ask him, I'd do just what we decided not to do: form a stock company."

"And we're not going to do that," Fred declared decisively. "We'll manage this thing somehow, so that you get everything for yourself."

"For ourselves," Bert corrected. "I didn't say so, but I've accepted your offer to buy stock. Five thousand dollars will buy you a one-third interest."

"One-fifth," said Fred.

"One-third!" Bert repeated. "That's settled, so shut up! We've got enough things to attend to without arguing about that. There are a lot of things that must be done, as you say; but many of them can wait until later, when the money begins to come in. I think we can get by with our seventy-five hundred. Now, about the advertising. What 'll we do about that?"

Fred thought a moment. "Let's see. Of course we want to get out a nice booklet, something like the last ones. It won't be quite as expensive this time, because we can use the same illustrations, and won't have to add but a few more—a picture of the spring, for one. The question is, how to get them to the proper people. We can't get lists, as we did before, because no company keeps a list of all the fat people in a city."

"Hardly," Bert laughed. "But how about selecting one advertising agency in each city and giving each one a bunch of booklets to dispose of. Then it would be up to them to earn their fees, and we wouldn't have to bother about it. Why, they could send men out on the street with the booklets and give one to every fat person who passes!"

"That's just what we'll do," agreed Fred. "I'll get in touch with some agencies right away, and find out how much it 'll cost us. We can let them attend to other kinds of advertising, too. But there can't be much of it, because we haven't the money to pay for it. In a country-wide advertising campaign, five thousand dollars is like ten cents."

"This won't need so much advertising," said Bert. "To tell you the truth, all we'd have to do is to send one fat person in each city a booklet, and he'd do our advertising for us! You won't have to urge them to come, Fred. Once they hear of it, you'll have to fight to keep 'em away."

"You say that as a joke, but there's a lot of truth in it," Fred replied. "If a man thought he could get back his spryness, or a woman thought she could get back her waist-line, they'd swim the Atlantic Ocean to do it. I have an aunt living in St. Louis who tries everything she hears about in order to lose weight. Why, she wrote me not long ago that she'd been starving herself for a month, and she was all excited because she lost eight pounds." He laughed. "Wait till Aunt Bertha hears of this! Will she be down here?"

"And wait till dad hears of it," echoed Bert. "He was as big as a house when I left last September, and getting bigger every day. We'll have to send him a booklet and let him come down here, not knowing that his own little Bertram is running the works! I suppose he thinks I've gone to perdition by this time!"

He paused. "You know what you ought to do, Fred? You ought to write this all up into an article and send it to the Sunday supplement. It 'll make great reading, and it 'll give us a million dollars' worth of advertising, free."

"That's the stuff!" Fred shouted, jumping to his feet and giving Bert a resounding slap upon the back. "That's how to reach 'em! The deuce with the advertising agencies and all of that! All we'll need to do with the booklets is to send 'em to the people who'll write us for information. I'll write an article that 'll be the news sensation of the day. Bert, you're a wiz!"

"Don't forget to feature David Hodge in it, Fred. You want to get a picture of him—and one of him when he was fat, if you can. If you want to make it a sure-fire article, you want to include a 'living example.' You know—'before and after.'"

"All right. Beat it home, now, Bert. I want to write that article to-night. Boy, it's going to be a lulu!"

"It couldn't help it," said Bert, rising.

"When do you think we can have our opening, Fred?"

Fred pondered a moment. "It 'll be a month, anyway. If I send this out to-morrow, it ought to be printed next Sunday, if they hold it for the Sunday edition. Well, it 'll take a week or two for it to take effect, and a week or two to complete our bookings. I think we can open it in about a month."

"Make it Thanksgiving Day, then—four weeks from next Thursday," said Bert. "You can include that in your article to hurry up the slow ones. How about it?"

"Great!" roared Fred. "Couldn't pick out a better day. Lord knows we'll have something to be thankful for. And as for our guests—why, they'll eat the first Thanksgiving Day dinner they've eaten since they got fat, and not have a guilty conscience afterwards!"

The article that Fred wrote that night was—to use his own phrase—"a lulu." The syndicate to which he submitted it welcomed it enthusiastically, and the editors of Sunday supplements, from Maine to California, featured it across two pages.

The result was the expected one. Letters, addressed to "Manager, Majestic Hotel," came pouring into *The Punch* office, and each of the writers was answered with a booklet whose Fredonian phraseology dispelled any doubts to which the newspaper article might have given rise.

Two weeks before the day set for the Majestic's opening every room had been reserved, and the number of additional applications for accommodations promised an endless stream of pilgrims to this new mecca of the middle west.

"It's a shame we can't accommodate more people," Fred declared one day. "It hurts me to have to write so many of these two-hundred pounders that they must wait from six months to a year before they can hope to become perfect thirty-sixes! We ought to tell 'em to come anyway, Bert, and let 'em find rooms wherever they can; and then we could charge so much for the right to drink the water."

So it was agreed; and when the tidings were sent broadcast over Selma that it

might thus share in Bert's good fortune, the town began to hum with preparations. Spare rooms were put in order, and, in many instances, rooms that had never been spare rooms were immediately so designated and reserved for eager guests. A sudden epidemic of solidly constructed furniture swept over Selma; and Mrs. Dan'l Seabury, whose delicate gilt-and-gold parlor set had for so long been the source of pride to herself and boundless admiration to her visitors, regretfully packed away the fragile pieces and ordered a Circassian walnut set from Pinebluff.

Anticipating an era of great prosperity, Selma changed color like a chameleon that is brought from darkness to light. Josh Hartley, the hardware man, replenished his stock of paints three times in as many weeks.

Even the Palace Hotel, the most slovenly, perhaps, of all of Selma's pathetically drooping structures, seemed to straighten and hold itself more erect in the sudden pride of its newly painted glory; and the reorganized Board of Selectmen, after an enthusiastic session during which each allusion to the name of Bing, Bang, Boom was greeted with applause, unanimously voted an appropriation for repairing the roadway, all the way from the railroad station to the Majestic Hotel.

The days, filled as they were with preparations, passed quickly, and soon came the eve of Thanksgiving Day.

David Hodge, returning to the railroad station from his supper, was met at the door by Amos, the usual excitement dancing in the youth's eyes and bubbling to his lips.

"Well!" said David. "What now?"

"That there Bing, Bang, Boom was here!" Amos exploded. "He come in on the six twenty, from Pinebluff. He was there all day, David."

"I don't see nothin' onusual in that," David declared, rubbing his hands together; for the November night was chill. "He's been goin' there 'bout three times a week."

"But he brung yer somethin'," said Amos. "It's a big box, wrapped up, an' ever'thin'. He couldn't wait fer you to git

back, he says, so he wrote somethin' fer me ter give yer."

"Well!"

"Here," said Amos, handing him an envelope. "An' I put th' package in th' telegram-room."

David led the way to the telegram-room, glanced at the large oblong package that lay on the table, seated himself, and ripped the edge from the envelope. The letter he drew out read:

DEAR DAVID:

Wanted to see you to-night, but didn't have time to wait for you. Have a million things to attend to at the hotel to-night. Been at Pinebluff all day, and finally hired a chef named Deschamps, who says he's the best in the world. He will get all necessary assistants, so that worry is over.

Don't remember if I told you or not that dad is coming to-morrow. He telegraphed for reservations the other day. If, by any chance, you should meet him before I do, don't let on that I'm the guy who owns—partly—the Majestic. He doesn't know I'm in Selma, at all!

Hope you'll like these things I brought you. I had to take a chance on the sizes, and I hope they'll fit you all right. I saw a lawyer this morning and got that contract written up. When you come to the hotel to-morrow morning, you, Fred and I will sign it and become real partners.

So-long, till to-morrow.

B. B. B.

While David was untying his package, Amos hovered near. Before his widening eyes David disclosed the contents of the box, holding up for their mutual inspection and admiration the dark gray suit, the satin-striped silk shirt, and the two flowing silk scarfs.

"Gosh!" Amos gasped. "Jiminy Christmus!"

"Everythin' but collars an' shoes!" breathed David, his eyes seeming about to dance right out of his head. "An' them I'll git from Blackton's fust thing in the mornin'. Bless my soul! What a boy!"

"He says he got somethin' fer me, too," fluttered Amos. "He says I'll git it when I come to th' hotel to-morrer. It's a uniform! An' it's got stripes down th' pants!"

"A uniform!" exclaimed David. "What 're you goin' to do with a uniform?"

"I'm quittin' this here job to-morrer when you do," replied Amos. "You don't think I'm gonna work fer that ole Dickson who's gonna take yer place, do yer? I sh'ud say not, I won't! I'm gonna be a bell-hop at th' Majestic, I am! That there Bing, Bang, Boom says I could, an' he says I'm gonna be gener'l sup'intendent of th' ice-water!"

"Glory be! You're sure comin' up in the world, Amos!"

"Ain't I, though?" Amos thrilled. "That's what I tol' that there Bing, Bang, Boom, an' he says I'll be goin' up right along."

"That you will," David agreed solemnly. "With the ice-water!"

## CHAPTER XXV.

### HER MAJESTY—THE MAJESTIC.

"THERE'S no use of talking," said Bert, leaning across the mahogany desk toward Fred, who stood behind it, "this hotel is certainly the heavy-weight champion of the world!"

"You said it!" Fred agreed smilingly. "And here comes another ton!"

Bert turned to face the door. Another bus-load of guests had arrived—four of them, to be exact. Bert calculated that their combined weights must have totaled no less than eight hundred and twenty pounds, with the lady of the party holding the honors of individual poundage. They walked heavily to the desk, and the three men stood aside for the lady to register.

"I hope you have reserved my room all right," she said anxiously, as Fred took the pen from her and read her signature.

"Indeed we have," assured Fred. "I hope you'll find everything satisfactory here, Mrs. Maguire." He tapped a bell at his elbow. "Front!"

"If I can really reduce here, anything will be satisfactory," sighed Mrs. Maguire. "Will you please have a pitcher of the water sent up to my room right away?"

"Oh, it mustn't be drunk that way," said Fred. "Just a glassful every morning. Here's a little booklet we had prepared by Dr. Nedman, of Fort Smith.

Read it over carefully, Mrs. Maguire. It's a scientific analysis of the water, and it gives complete instructions for its use so as to get the best results. You will see how enthusiastically the doctor speaks of it."

He turned to Amos, who, resplendent in his new uniform, had responded to the call of "Front!" "Room 25," he said, handing over a key.

Mrs. Maguire waddled away in the wake of Amos, and a man took his place before the register.

"A widow," he said to Fred, nodding his head backward in the direction of the departing Mrs. Maguire. "I'm from Kalamazoo, too, but we never met till we got on the train together. Fine woman. Splendid!"

He turned his head to regard the object of his sincerely spoken compliment, who was laboriously and ponderously mounting the stairs. "Yes; really a fine woman. And pretty, too—minus a hundred pounds." And he signed the register with a flourish.

"All things come to him who waits," replied Fred, with a slight smile. "Let's see. What is the name? Oh, yes—Mr. Jibbers. Well, Mr. Jibbers, you don't seem to be so very corpulent yourself."

"Oh, no," Mr. Jibbers replied, running his palms over his slightly protuberant waistcoat. "I really wouldn't care to lose more than twenty pounds. One-eighty is my best weight. To tell you the truth, I had no idea of coming here when I got on the train. I'm a traveling man, and I was bound for St. Louis. But, as I said, I met Mrs. Maguire on the train, and—well, I have a great eye for possibilities, young man. A great eye for possibilities. Always did have. That's why I telegraphed for reservations when we changed trains at St. Louis. I can stand to lose twenty pounds. One eighty is my best weight."

Fred tapped the bell.

"Front!" he called; and when a boy responded: "Show the gentleman to Room 26."

When the other two men had registered and had been sent off to their rooms, Bert and Fred looked at each other and winked, simultaneously.

"I'll be sorry when the clerks come and I have to give up this job," laughed Fred. "This is great!"

"It's a scream," Bert agreed. "Something tells me it would be worth while operating this hotel even if we didn't get twelve dollars a day per head. It's worth a fortune just to stay here and watch the transformations."

"That reminds me of what that Wilber woman told me when she came in this morning. Were you here then?"

"I don't believe so. What was it?"

"She said she had brought along four sizes of clothes. The size she's wearing now, which she had made to order, a medium size stylish stouts, forties, and thirty-sixes. And she told me she's going to stay here till she can wear the thirty-sixes!"

Since nine o'clock that Thanksgiving morning, when the Majestic had thrown open its doors to its guests, there had been a steady stream of men and women, come to take possession of the rooms they had reserved. Many had arrived at Selma the day before, lodging for the night wheresoever they could procure rooms until the Majestic was ready to receive them; others had arrived on the early morning train.

Now, at eleven o'clock, three-fourths of the number of expected guests had already claimed their reservations; and these were now in the lobby and on the loggia, outside, talking together or sitting about, waiting to inspect the new arrivals; each, probably, in the inevitable hope of the portly, that he would discover some one stouter than himself.

Bert let his eyes rove about the crowded room, and then returned his gaze to Fred.

"I wonder why dad hasn't shown up?" he said anxiously. "I've been looking forward to his surprise for weeks."

"Don't worry about it," Fred replied hopefully. "He's probably on the train that just came in at eleven two."

Indeed, the object of their discourse was even at that moment stepping down from the platform of the train that had just come to a groaning stop at Selma.

Mr. Jasper Boom would have resented the assertion that he was fat; but he was, unquestionably, generously stout. His in-



creasing fleshiness had long given him some concern; and when he had found the Majestic Hotel's alluring booklet among his morning's mail, he read it through, and came to a sudden decision.

"I'm going up there for a week or two, Mary," he told his wife, after she, too, had read the booklet. "I didn't realize how much weight I've taken on lately until yesterday afternoon when I was taking my golf lesson. The instructor says to me: 'Stand erect, don't bend your knees, and keep your eye on the ball.'

"Well, when I stood up straight and didn't bend my knees, I couldn't see the ball! So I knew I must be getting stout. Anyway," he added, "even if this water won't do what is claimed for it, the rest will do me good. Besides, this hotel is down in Arkansas, Mary, and—and I believe that was where our boy was headed when he left here. While I'm down in that part of the country I'd like to try to find a trace of him."

"I wish you would, Jasper," was all Mrs. Boom said; but the shadow that crossed her face told him that she shared his secret fear for the boy's welfare. Two lonely, dreary months had crept by since he had left them, and they had not heard a word of him.

Mr. Jasper Boom was thinking of this as he stepped from the train and walked across the crowded platform toward the waiting line of buses. He made his way through a babbling, shifting throng, pausing at length before the driver of one of the buses who was standing beside his equipage, ready to assist his portly fares up the step.

"Is this bus for the Majestic?" asked Mr. Boom.

"Fer th' Palace," answered the driver. "I ain't makin' my hosses take Prospect Hill with these loads! Palace is fur enough."

Mr. Boom snorted. "Any buses around here that are leaving for the Majestic?"

"That one on t'other side o' th' platform," the man replied, jerking his head indicatively to the left. "Reckon Jeb Hill will start directly."

"Thanks," said Mr. Boom, pausing a

moment before entering again the jostling crowd on the platform. "Say, you seem to have a lively town here. What's the population?"

"Twenty-five hundred an' Bing, Bang, Boom," was the reply. "That makes about ten thousand, all told!"

"Beg pardon?" said Mr. Boom; "what makes ten thousand?"

But several men, whose destination was the Palace, approached at that moment, and the driver turned away, leaving Mr. Boom's question unanswered. Mr. Boom started across the platform again, and almost immediately a youth sprang out at him, reaching for his suit-case.

"Lemme carry yer satchel, mister!"

Mr. Boom relinquished his suit-case to the outstretched hand.

"Boy," he said wearily, "lead me to a bus that 'll take me to the Majestic." He regarded the little fellow before him. "You're pretty small to carry such a big load, aren't you, sonny?"

"Naw-w-w," replied the boy in an aggrieved tone. "I kin carry more'n this, I betcha! Why, purty soon I'm gonner try an' git a job with that there Bing, Bang, Boom!" And as if the thought of this prospective attempt filled him with sudden power, he lifted the suit-case and started away, staggering under its weight.

Mr. Boom lifted his hat and scratched his head. He wondered if Bing, Bang, Boom, which, the bus driver had given him to understand, was equivalent to a population of about eight thousand—was a nearby town or some large industrial plant. He'd never heard of it. He was recalled from his thoughts with a start, for two men passed him at that moment; and a snatch of their conversation came to him.

"So Josh he suggested gittin' out a bond issue fer it, but that there Bing, Bang, Boom said 'no,' an' that ended—"

Mr. Boom turned and gazed after the men, who were soon lost in the crowd. There was a strange, wondering look in his eyes. Three times in as many minutes he had heard his own name.

"Better hurry up, mister," said the boy who held his suit-case; "that there keer-age is goin' ter start soon."

Even as the boy spoke and hurried forward, with Mr. Boom at his heels, the vehicle that was their objective left the curb and started up the road.

"Too late!" said the boy, pausing at the edge of the platform. "Well," he added philosophically, "I guess Jeb was full up anyways."

"Damn!" Mr. Boom muttered under his breath. "Will I ever get away from this station?"

"That's what I was wonderin' fer eight years," said a man who was seated in a buggy near which Mr. Boom was standing.

Mr. Boom looked up quickly. The man who had addressed him was tall—one could perceive that, even though the man was seated—and rather thin. He was carefully attired, his wide-brimmed felt hat, his smart gray suit, his flowing cravat and silk shirt looking as if they had just been taken from the haberdasher's window. Mr. Boom judged him to be some prosperous farmer.

"I beg your pardon," said Mr. Boom. "Were you speaking to me?"

The man nodded. "I heard you wonderin' if you'd ever git away from this here station," he drawled, "an' I said that I'd been wonderin' that fer eight years."

Mr. Boom blinked. The man looked sane!

"If you're goin' to the Majestic," added the man, "why, jest jump in an' I'll take you up. I'm headed fer there, myself."

"Thank you!" said Mr. Boom heartily, taking his suit-case from the boy and dropping a coin into his palm. He climbed into the buggy. "This is very kind of you," he told the driver.

The man made no reply. He clucked gently to his horse; and soon they were traveling up the road toward the distant village.

"I hope you'll pardon my curiosity," Mr. Boom said after a long period of silence, "but just what did you mean by saying that you've been wondering for eight years if you'd ever get away from that station. One might imagine that you had been waiting there for eight years!"

"I was," replied the man.

Mr. Boom, who had lighted a cigar, sud-

denly dug his molars into it. He looked at his companion, but the expected smile was not on his lips. Evidently the man was in earnest!

"What—what were you waiting for?" asked Mr. Boom, realizing at once that he must be a bit crazy, himself, to give credence to so improbable a thing.

"Fer Bing, Bang, Boom," the man replied promptly.

Mr. Boom dropped his cigar from his mouth and forgot to pick it up.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he gasped.

His host said nothing. He was staring mildly up the road, above the ears of his trotting horse.

"Say!" exploded Jasper Boom. "Who the devil or what the devil is this Bing, Bang, Boom? What is a Bing, Bang Boom!"

The man turned his head away and spat carefully into the road. Then he turned to his questioner.

"Did you ever read about the battle o' Gettysburg?"

Mr. Boom nodded wonderingly. "Of—course."

"Did you ever see a cyclone?"

"Why—yes; I saw one in St. Louis, twenty odd years ago—"

"Did you ever see a mad bull in a china shop?"

"Why—what are you talking about, sir?"

"Well," drawled the man, "jest picture all o' them things gathered together into one package that weighs about a hundred an' sixty-five pounds. That's Bing, Bang, Boom."

By the time that Mr. Jasper Boom arrived at the Majestic Hotel, he felt queerly giddy. He had undergone the rare experience of conversing with a fellow man for three-quarters of an hour, in his own native tongue, without understanding a word that was said. Not only was he giddy, but he was greatly exasperated. When he mounted the steps to the loggia and blustered into the spacious lobby, there was battle in his eye. He chafingly waited to take his place before the register.

"Mr. Boom," murmured the blond

young man behind the desk, examining the signature. "Have you made reservations, Mr. Boom?"

"Of course I have!" cried Mr. Boom. "I telegraphed a week ago!"

"I see," the clerk replied seriously. Mr. Boom could not see that the young man's blue eyes were twinkling merrily. "Well, I'll have to let you see the manager, I suppose. Just step around the counter into that office, please."

Mr. Boom stepped. He stepped high, for he was painfully indignant. He was going to tell that manager what he thought of him, and of his town, and of its half-witted citizens.

But in the doorway to the private office he stopped short and stared with bulging eyes at the manager who stood facing him.

"Bertram!" he gasped, meeting the boy's rush and hugging him to his breast. "Why—Bertram!"

"Don't call me that, dad!" laughed Bert, drawing away and gripping his father's hand. "They call me Bing, Bang, Boom here!"

"I might have known!" roared Mr. Boom, Sr., gazing proudly at his boy. "The battle of Gettysburg, the St. Louis cyclone, and the mad bull in the china shop! Why, good Lord, didn't I bring you up myself? I might have known!"

"Why—what are you talking about, dad?"

"Damned if I know!" cried Jasper Boom, laughing right out of his heart. "And I don't care!"

Of all brilliant events that Selma could recall from the past—and in the days of the old Majestic there had been many events that deserved so distinguished a qualifying adjective as "brilliant"—there had been none to surpass the formal opening of the new Majestic. The luncheon, and, more particularly, the dinner, excused M. Deschamps's unblushing pride in his culinary ability; the guests ate heartily—with a fearless heartiness, I might say; and a more jovial, happy assembly it would have been impossible to find.

After dinner, and a period of necessary recuperation, every one repaired to the

large room down-stairs which had formerly been a casino, had almost been a silence room, and was now a ballroom quite large enough to accommodate a hundred and fifty guests, even of such generous proportions as most of these.

The dance that followed was equally as successful as the dinner, though the orchestra had to adjust the tempo of its selections to suit the occasion—a tempo that was rather too slow for the more slender guests of the evening. As for the "Shimmy"—why, the management just couldn't forbid it, without putting every innocent couple off the floor!

It was toward the close of the evening that David Hodge made his way to Bert's side and regarded the young man calculatingly through half-closed eyes. Bert was standing in a corner of the ballroom, apart from the laughing, chattering guests, his legs wide-spread, his hands buried deep into his trouser-pockets: a gloomy attitude that was alien to the surroundings.

"Son," said David, "you don't look entirely happy to-night."

"I'm not—entirely," Bert replied heavily.

David was silent a moment.

"I seen Ruth Warren this afternoon, son."

"Yes?" Bert tried to appear unconcerned.

"I told her all about how your dad came here, an' how proud he was o' you."

Bert straightened suddenly. "You did!"

"I did," affirmed David. "You ain't got no objections, have you?"

"Of course not!" said Bert. "I—I wanted her to know."

"You like her a leetle bit, don't you, son?"

"Like her?" breathed Bert, shutting his eyes. "Why—why—I love her, David!"

"Well, now!" drawled David. "That's the fust time I've got you to admit it. But I don't see why you're so durn gloomy about it. You certainly didn't expect her to come to the dance t'-night with her father and Sarah, did you? Yet, jest b'-cause she didn't come, you look like you're ready to turn over on your side an' give your death rattle. Huh!"

Bert's lips tightened. "Don't kid yourself, David! I told Ruth a long time ago that when I made a success of this hotel I was—going after her! And I am!"

"H-m!" said David. "Y' know, I jest come in from outside, son."

"Well?"

"It's a beautiful night," David went on. "There's a yellin' moon up with a man's face grinnin' out'n it."

Bert ignored him.

"An' there's at least two million more stars twinklin' than ever twinkled b'fore."

Bert didn't move.

"An' that there moon streams down in purty leetle patches in the lane yonder, an' you kin see the stars every now 'n' then through the trees."

"Great guns!" cried Bert. "Will you let up, David?"

"One more leetle thing I noticed when I was out there, son. Ruth Warren jest drove up with her surrey to call for her dad an' Sarah. She's waitin' out there now."

Bert did not hesitate. Without a word to David, he dashed from the room, leaving by one of the doors that gave upon the paved promenade that ran the length of the building, under the loggia. Outside, he paused, letting his eager eyes sweep down the lines of vehicles that edged the moon-flooded driveway.

Excepting for the muffled strains of music that came through the closed windows behind him, the clearing was as deserted as at that not distant time when the Majestic had lain wrapped in the decaying slumber of abandonment. In the blue-black byrn-

ous of the night there were myriads of loopholes through which glittered tiny points of fire; and through an opening larger than the rest streamed down a sphere of soft and mellow light that changed the brown turf of the terraced clearing into a gently rolling lake, and silvered, too, the leaf-deserted boughs of the trees beyond.

The soft light enabled Bert to single out the Warren surrey from the double lines of empty vehicles. Ruth was in the front seat; and he took his stand beside her, leaning forward into the shadows that closed about her.

"Ruth," he said, "I came to have a talk with you."

Even in the shadows her eyes reflected some of the starlight that the surrey-top shut out.

"Oh—not now," she quavered, as if his nearness frightened her. "I—I'm waiting—"

"Yes—now," he insisted. "They won't be leaving for fifteen or twenty minutes." He paused. "We'll drive down the road a bit—to where I made you listen to me once before."

Perhaps she wouldn't have let him drive her away; perhaps she wouldn't have listened to what he had to tell her—which, it is not unlikely, she already knew; but, as David had remarked, there was a yellow moon up with a man's face grinning out of it, and there were at least two million more stars twinkling than ever twinkled before; and through the trees of the lane beyond the moon streamed down, casting pretty little patches of mingled light and shadow on the road.

(The end.)

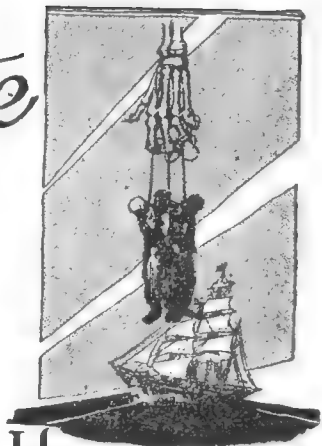
## ENTRE NOUS

BY REATA VAN HOUTEN

**T**IS well to bear this truth in mind:  
That since the world began,  
Man's love for maid the lesser is  
Than ever maid's for man!

# Teach: Pirate De Luxe

by C.J. Cutcliffe Hyne



THE first of the series of stories detailing the adventures of "Teach: Pirate De Luxe," was printed in the *All-Story Weekly*, issue of May 22. One has been printed each week since then, and this is the last of the series.

## XV—THE RECKONING

"DEAR Jim," wrote Miss Mary Arncliffe to Captain James Buckden. "After a lot of thought it has come to this: I must ask you to cancel our engagement. Don't run away with the idea that I'm going to marry somebody else, because I most emphatically am not. But, frankly, I have met another man that I like better than anybody else in all the world. From a marrying point of view he is perfectly impossible. But I couldn't marry any one else.

"You haven't seen me now for a year, and I haven't heard from you. You're a dear good fellow, Jim, and I hope you have already found, or at all events will soon find, some girl who will make you a far better wife than Mary Arncliffe."

The letter was undated, and I personally never made out exactly when it was written, though I have a shrewd notion that the stationery was that provided for the Brazilian navy.

There was obviously no means of posting it on the *Jao Geraes*, because the cruiser, when Mary joined her, had just coaled, and was off on a lengthy patrol. So one pre-

sumes she wrote for the easing of her conscience—in case.

From a European point of view the *Jao Geraes* was not a comfortable ship. To begin with she was vastly dirty and carried on her an abominable smell. She swarmed with rats. She crawled with cockroaches. She even carried to sea with her specimens of the Bahia mosquito. Her crew were mostly dark-skinned, except those that were of an unblushing black, and any piece of her ancient machinery or armament that would spoil or corrode had been allowed to do so throughout many leisurely commissions.

Her commander, that elegant brun, Captain Jacob Smith, never appeared on deck till the world was well aired, and always retired below when the evening chill threatened. Like the sun-dial he counted only the sunny hours, and even from these deducted a hundred and eighty minutes siesta.

He felt it due to his position as captain to spend at least three good hours on this mid day nap. He remembered complacently the barbarous times when, as a junior

officer, he had had his siesta cut down to a niggardly eighty minutes, and even at times had been forced by a hated superior to keep a watch at night.

There are some terrible martinets in the Brazilian navy.

As part of the international force that was chasing after Admiral Teach, up and down the oceans, the Jao Geraes had been driven reluctant from her moorings by the weighty hand of shore authority, and forced to sea. She had been allotted a definite patrol, and an extremely clean chart, with the limits of this carefully mapped out, reposed on the battens under the chart-house roof.

I forget the exact number of tons of coal that Captain Smith signed for as being delivered into the bunkers of the Jao Geraes, but will represent it by that much abused letter x. In actual fact,  $\frac{x}{2}$  tons had been so delivered. The trifling balance of the remaining  $\frac{x}{2}$  tons was a matter of amicable arrangement between the coal merchant and Captain Jacob Smith, whereby they both profited, but over which you and I have no pecuniary concern.

These things are no doubt lamentable, but they occur. So, continuing out the illustration, if a supply of x tons of coal would, by the calculation of shore authority, enable the Jao Geraes to steam exactly y miles, it was quite obvious that a supply of  $\frac{x}{2}$  tons would do nothing of the sort.

But Captain Jacob Smith was a mathematician, as indeed all sailors have to be nowadays. He merely split his y as he had previously mutilated the x, and all was for the best at once.  $\frac{x}{2}$  tons would carry the Jao Geraes  $\frac{y}{2}$  sea miles.

What more could any one want—especially if the elaborate chart which called for double the distance lay collecting dust behind those mahogany battens overhead. There were no earnest enquirers among officers or crew. Even the snuff-and-butter colored ones, who thought themselves somebodies, hoped to be captains themselves one day and come in for the sweets of office.

"I have come to look upon the old Jao as my own private yacht," Captain Smith confided one perfect morning to his passenger. "I don't like hurrying, so we never

hurry. I can't sleep at night if the screw's grinding, so the chief engineer humors me and doesn't let it grind.

"I don't like wet decks, so they aren't wetted. But I must confess to a weakness for garlic in most dishes, and there I am afraid I have offended you."

"Not at all," said Mary cheerfully. "At home in Skipton, I'll grant you never see garlic from one year's end to another. But I put in thirty months as a W. A. A. C. in France, and rarely came across food without it."

Captain Smith waved graceful plum-colored fingers to indicate Miss Arncliffe's blacked bobbed hair.

"You still carry your battle-scars, I see. I am sure that all other warriors wish their scars could be as effective.

"And now what shall we have for lunch? I'll have the chef up and you shall inspire him. By the way, we are rather short of room on the Jao, but I turned out my first lieutenant to give you the best cabin I had. I hope you are comfortable?"

"Ye-es," said Mary thoughtfully. "Oh, yes, I'm quite an old campaigner, you know. But Mr.—er—Mr. Buzz—"

"Mr. Alvarado."

"I never could pronounce that name as you do—but he's got all his own little comforts there, and it makes me feel horrid to displace him. Couldn't you let me have a bit of a place here on deck, Captain Smith, where I'm pointing?"

"I'd much prefer it if you would. You see, we're tremendously keen on open air at home."

"I've heard a tale that you Yorkshire folk sleep out of doors all the year round," said Captain Smith, with a luxurious shudder.

"We do," said Mary, lying stoutly, and suppressing a grin as she thought of Skipton's winter climate. "I suppose I couldn't have that round shed thing there for a cabin?"

"You could certainly, if you care for it. It's only a gun-house. If you've really a preference that way, I'll have it cleaned out. It can be ready for you in a couple of days."

"Now that's delightful of you. Lend me a hair-brush, and a bit of looking-glass,

and a packing-case for dressing-table, and I'll make it into a Cunard state-room in half no time."

That afternoon, at two o'clock, the Jao Geraes, drifting along under the easiest of steam, was obliged to notice another inhabitant of the vacant sea. In fact, she very nearly ran her down, and the man at the wheel, rubbing his drowsy eyes, hastily shifted course, and then bawled for the officer of the watch, who was snoring in a deck chair at the end of the bridge.

That worthy did not altogether take in the situation at a glance. But at the end of five minutes' yawning he was sufficiently awake to ring off the drowsy engines and—as an effort of spite—to send down the quartermaster to rouse Captain Smith. He had his knife into Captain Smith for being so unreasonable as to want any officer to keep a midday watch.

Captain Jacob Smith, aroused most reluctantly from his sacred siesta, very naturally retaliated. He ordered the impertinent officer to call away a boat and go and investigate. Then, being joined by Miss Arncliffe, he had himself to wake up more thoroughly. He handed her his binoculars.

"I don't want those," she shuddered. "I suppose those men hanging on that spar are real?"

"On the foreyard? Oh, they're men, all right. Or were. Looks as though we were on the track of your friend, Admiral Teach, almost, doesn't it? I've sent a man aloft to make sure, and he reports nothing else in sight.

"Three of them dangling below that yard, aren't there?—and so far as one can make out through the glass, they look like Germans. The schooner—she's an ordinary topsail schooner—as you see, is English. At least, her name, John and Louise, is English enough, though to me she's the look of a West Indian trader about her. All canvas furled, too, and nobody visible on deck. Rather an impossible sort of vessel to meet out here, isn't she?"

"Then do you think this is a bit of Teach's work?"

"My dear young lady, I have no means of being sure. I merely make a guess. As we seem to have lost our siestas, and to be

thoroughly awake, what do you say to lowering another boat and rowing across?"

"That fool of an officer of mine doesn't seem to be making anything of it. To give you a confidence, I don't mind telling you there's a good deal of dark blood in him, and that's fatal for efficiency. His kind are the curse of our service. Just excuse me a moment, and I'll see cushions are put into the stern-sheets of my gig for you."

The schooner, when they reached it, was sufficiently surprising. She was neat and spic and clean with the extreme of nautical dandiness; the blowsy Brazilian seamen were a blot upon her, wherever they moved; and even below, in her cabin and fore-castle, everything was exactly spruce and ordered.

But the three figures dangling by the neck from her foreyard offended the eye and made the gorge rise. Their shadows, which chased about the white deck-planks as the schooner rolled to the swell, gave a shuddering chill to any one they fell upon.

"Germans, all right," said Captain Jacob Smith. "Huns, I suppose you would call them, Miss Arncliffe. Dutchmen as your friend, Admiral Teach, and his kind would say.

"But I wonder how they came there? This schooner's British and two hundred and fifty tons, and it's hardly likely they were her entire crew and strung themselves up there without help. I think there's more in the immediate past history of the John and Louise than we have discovered so far."

"That's obvious," Mary snapped at him. She never could endure inefficiency. "Have your people made a thorough search of what's below, or shall I try?"

"To tell the truth, I don't think they've been below at all, although, of course, they tell me they have. You know we Brazilians always jump to the idea of *pesta bubonica* when we see a deserted ship."

"However, as there's nothing more of interest, suppose we return to the yacht? I like to think I'm giving you a cruise in a yacht, Miss Arncliffe, instead of a sordid war-ship."

"Thank you, but I'm going to look

down below myself, if nobody else wants to. Please don't come with me, Captain Smith. I should hate to think of your getting in the way of infection."

The black man laughed. He was bone idle. But there was nothing of the coward about him. And when the English girl flounced away to the schooner's narrow companion, he said nothing, but followed, smiling, at her heels. I have always had a liking for Captain Jacob Smith, indolent rogue though he may be.

"Phew!" said Miss Arncliffe when she got below.

"You're all for the fresh air, aren't you?" said her host with a whimsical smile.

"Preferably. But, at any rate, this is a clean stuffiness. There's nothing sour about it.

"I suppose that's the captain's state-room? H-m! Bed made. Pajamas folded. Pink carpet slippers at the side of the wash-stand ready to put on."

"And the log made up to yesterday afternoon, which is unusual for a bit of a trading schooner. (I don't mind betting you, Miss Arncliffe, the old Jao's log hasn't been touched since we cast off from moorings.) Listen to this last entry: '*Made noon observation so-and-so.—Four flying-fish came aboard. Had three fried for cuddy tea.*' My gad, can you beat it for old-time flavor? And here it's dated yesterday. That might have been written a hundred years ago."

"By the late Captain Blackbeard, for instance?"

"Er—there you're a bit beyond me. I don't know much history, outside my own country's. But this entry here is English, plain, stark English. And there are no English aboard."

"You're sure those—those hanging things are German?"

Captain Smith handed a packet of letters in an alien script.

"One of my men went up on to the foreyard, and got on the foot-rope and reached down and searched their pockets. He found these. What do you make of them?"

"*'Mein liebe Frau,'*" read Mary, and then broke off and shuddered. "Yes," she said, "they're German letters."

"Your friend Admiral Teach writes

plays. We had his "*Putting Salt on His Tail*" performed at our state theater in Bahia, and really it was a good deal better, than I had expected. Frankly, like every body else, I went to see the Pirate Teach's idea of a play rather than a play I expected to like. But, my gad, Miss Arncliffe, if he was here, couldn't he get a notion for one of those mystery dramas?"

"Then you don't think he has the key of it? You don't believe he hung these three, and—er—did away with the schooner's English crew? Or do you think that?"

Miss Arncliffe permitted herself the luxury of a stamp with a very neat shoe on the John and Louise's cuddy carpet. "Captain Smith, you're a sailor and a naval officer. Please tell me plainly what has happened."

Captain Jacob Smith straightened to the compliment.

"I'm dashed if I know," he said frankly.

"But don't imagine I'm not interested. I am, as much as you are.

"The whole blessed thing's impossible. Here's a British ship in perfect fettle, but with no vestige of crew. She doesn't carry a shot mark or the trace of a scrimmage. There has been no heavy weather, and the schooner's plenty of provisions and water. There is no apparent reason for her crew to have left.

"But gone they are, and before they cleared out, they took the trouble to hang three Huns who apparently 'appeared out of nowhere. Oh, yes, and I forgot to mention the schooner has two boats still on board. It is extremely unlikely she had more. I suppose she carried an emergency balloon, and the crew cleared off in that!

"Sorry, Miss Arncliffe, that I can't be more helpful. It's more, as I say, in the line of a writing fellow, like Teach, than mine. I've no more imagination in my composition than you'd find in half a kilo of bacalhao."

Mary began to find that liking for Captain Smith which a woman always does for a man who confesses his limitations and appeals to the other sex for help. She tapped him on his white-sleeved arm with a confidential finger.

"You and I," she said, "are going to



worry this out—somehow. You needn't be nervous about bubonic plague. If this schooner's people had died of anything unpleasant like that, they wouldn't have left the beds made—as they are.

"And you needn't hanker after Admiral Teach. He isn't the only person in this world with imagination. As a point of fact, I may tell you I read his play long before it was produced, and I thought it piffle, and told him so."

"And you still live! Now one always thought that no pirate could put up with even the most ordinary criticism. I'm sure if I met Admiral Teach I should be extremely chary in telling him I did not like the way he wore his nose, or that I failed to admire his taste in clipped ears. You've certainly a way with you, Miss Arncliffe."

"However—long may we stay apart from Teach. The thing that interests you just now, and therefore me, is the recent history of this John and Louise. My dear lady, let us dig into it. If you will investigate the starboard side of this cabin, I will try my hand on the port, and when we meet at the rudder-casing we'll compare notes."

Mary went across to the starboard side and with a blush tackled the bachelor's sea bedroom that lay there. Up till then she had always thought the house of her maiden aunt, Miss Dorothy Arncliffe, at Carleton, near Skipton, touched the high-water mark of unhuman tidyness. But this unknown sailorman's box of a home won out easily in competition with the little place at Carleton.

It was like nothing on the land. Its woodwork was painted in mast color, relieved with a rasping green; the bedding in the plain wooden tank of a bunk was as rigidly smooth as a rink of ice; the fancy rope-work, with turk's-head decoration, was all of cotton, and white as scrubbing could make it.

Not a yarn was out of place. Not even a finger-smear disgraced the painted walls or the snowy deck.

The one article of considerable furniture was a wooden sea-chest, painted a vivid blue. Its rope becketts were laced down by lanyards to ring-bolts in the deck, and it sat there rigid against all movement.

Mary turned it, and lifted the lid. Then she closed it again. Inside, tacked against the pine, were crude photographs of a stout woman with high, old-fashioned figure, and three of ungainly maidens. Held together by a piece of spun-yarn, was a packet of their sprawling letters.

"How beastly of me to have looked," said Mary, as she relocked the chest.

She was going out of that tidy dwelling, and had the door in her hand ready to close reverently behind her, when her eye slid on to the only unordered item in the place. It was a wad of paper, written on with black pencil, folded and refolded, and fastened by a tack to the back of the door.

A heavy thumb had driven the tack, as thumb-marking around it showed. And the tack had been driven awry. It bore witness to a haste which jarred upon one among the niggling tidyness of that little sea retiring-room.

Mary Arncliffe pulled the tack, flattened the paper, and read:

Sch. John and Louise, At Sea.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

Dear Friend—These few words will tell what happened. The Huns boarded us from a steamboat flying Souwegan colors as looked like a tramp. They shot the old man, and the mate, and P. Ings, who signed on the same day as me, they not resisting. The Huns said they had to be terrible, by orders, and these came first. They also said they was Teach and his gang, which was a lie, Teach being English, anyway, and them speaking with the Dutch accent.

There was four of us left, me they calling second mate, though signed on as bo's'n, and Ham, which was cook, him being a colored man. The other two was deckhands, Deepdale and Outershaw by name, and very nippy young fellows I will admit, though not proper sailormen, as neither of them could turn-in a turk's head.

The Hun steamboat left three hands as what they called a prize crew, they being very particular to be called captain, first lieutenant, and second lieutenant, and us having to touch hats to them every time we pass, though it may be three times a minute. (Our old man was not a one for style like that, but a proper sailor and that clean you wouldn't believe. These Huns could navigate, I'll allow them that. But they wasn't clean. We had to be clean for them.)

When asked civil where they was taking

the schooner to, they said at first, hell, thinking that mighty smart. But afterward him we had to call second loot let on we was beating up for a rendeyvoo, but the Lord knows where. The loot didn't.

Then Teach come, the right article this time, he being in a Bahama sponge-boat half the size of the John and Louise. He said he was Teach, and we believed him, and he hanged the three Dutchmen for taking his name in vain, according to law.

That Dutch Hun skipper he objected to being hanged with the two others, he being a commissioned officer, and them not. So this Teach accommodated him, and he was strung to the starboard arm of the foreyard, and his two loots to the port. A fat party with a nineteen-inch collar did the actual hanging, and I never saw nothing in that line done neater. And you can take it from me that a hanging requires a neat touch or it's easy bungled by reason of the party as is being strung up objecting.

The three Huns are there at this moment of writing, and I hope they'll sun-dry and hang as a warning to other Huns who want to get fresh. I never liked our old man living. But after they'd killed him, I always remembered him as the cleanest man that ever stood in a ship. R. I. P.

Captain Teach has not any vacancies among his crew, but liking the looks of Deepdale and Outershaw and me, and not objecting to poor old Ham, says he'll take us with him if we like to sign on. I suppose it's pirating, but that seems his affair more than mine. The pay's good, and I want a change. So here goes.

Kind friend, if you find this, please post news to my old woman at—here follows the address—and take the two dollars and thirty-seven cents you will find in the till of my sea-chest for the stamps and your trouble.

I do not address her or the girls direct, as they will understand, not wishing them to be mixed up with me if I get into trouble. I remember my lesson last time, over being caught trying to run that stuff into Tampico, and I promised then I would never bring such disgrace on my old woman's head again, and would always remember my daughters was girls, as she said.

(Signed) Yrs truly  
O. STARBOTTON.

Miss Arncliffe dabbed moisture from her eye with one of the Jao Geraes's scanty stock of pocket-handkerchiefs. Her verbal comment of "How dreadful!" did not in the least account for the cause of her emotion.

But at least it was due to Captain Smith to share the letter with him. So when

her eyes were restored to a normal dryness she went out into the main cabin and called, and a bored and dusky Smith, throwing away a cigarette-stump, promptly came to her.

"You have done the lady-detective act successfully! Good. I wish I'd half your brains, Miss Arncliffe, and—say—a tenth of your energy. I'm afraid we creoles get very slack at times. You see, the sun affects us far more than it does you.

"And yet my grandfather was a Portuguese, and they're a tremendously energetic people. What a weird letter. The fellow writes a worse fist than I do."

"Read it," said the lady impatiently.

"Oh, certainly, if you think I ought to—h-m—hello—our friend Teach again. Can't get away from him, you see, Miss Arncliffe. And that pleases you, doesn't it?"

"You keep harping on Teach," said Mary with a spirit of temper. "I dread the man."

"So does half the world," replied Captain Jacob Smith soberly. "And half the world talks of him every day with its breakfast, whether it is coffee and rolls or kidney and bacon. A couple of years ago it was the great war that filled everybody's thoughts. Now it's Teach. He's a big man."

"If you take a census of opinion you will find he's looked upon as a great nuisance," said Miss Arncliffe coldly. "How many people out of those who talked about the man know him personally? Not one in ten million."

"I've only met one individual who knew him," said Smith dryly, "and I must say that socially the fellow seemed to have his points. Hullo!"

*Bang!*

Captain Jacob Smith jumped to his feet with unaccustomed activity and made for the companion.

"One of my guns. What am I shooting at?"

*Bang! Bang-bang! R-r-r-r-r-pt!*

"Machine guns going now. Something close up. Curse the ass who slid on this hatch to keep out the sun. Ah, there we are. And now, what's doing?"

"Miss Arncliffe, you'd better keep below

out of harm's way for the time being. Do you hear me? I say, keep below."

"If you don't let me out, I shall stick a hatpin into you."

Captain Jacob Smith grinned and moved.

"Oh, if you will be foolish, please come out on deck. I'm afraid you'll see your friend Teach getting his gruel. It must be Teach in that little fruit-steamer with the green flag, and here's the old Jao's one chance in her lifetime of going into action, and I'm not on board of her to take command.

"Maddening, isn't it? Not that the news of it will ever get ashore to my admiralty."

"What's happened? I don't grasp it yet."

"It's clear enough. That funny little steamer—she's a twenty-knot fruiter from the West Indies for a Carolina port—has been coming up to us down the shine of the sunset. Trusted to her speed.

"My fools of course have kept no proper lookout. She thought she was going to lay us alongside and carry us by boarding in the fine old style, and if she's managed to touch sides, I don't say but what she'd have brought it off. My fellows are a pretty slack lot when I'm not there to put ginger into them. As it is they've dropped on her just in time."

"But you've only two big guns firing."

"The other gun-house," said Smith dryly, "is a lady's boudoir at the moment, and that would take some explaining if anybody ashore got busy later on and asked questions.

"But there's going to be no trouble. Mr. Fruitboat's sinking finely. Even my fools of gun-layers can't miss a mark like that at three-hundred-yard range. That fruitboat's bridge gives the show away, doesn't it? Take my glasses."

"I can see better without, thanks. The bridge is sandbagged of course. But why not?"

"My dear lady, what fruiter, if he was merely a fruiter, ever built himself a shot-proof conning-tower on his upper bridge with sand-bags? No, it's your pal, Teach, all right. If one'd any doubt about the matter there's his infernal Irish Republican flag blowing out astern in full evidence.

"Well, thank the Lord I'm not messed up with the tangles of your British and American politics. My beauties know a pirate when they see one, and they're not going to hold their shot when they get a mark like that.

"By gad, look! That one's into his boilers. She's stopped. Now they've got her!"

"But, Captain Smith! Signal them to cease fire. You mustn't let them shell a sinking ship that's surrendered."

"The man's a man," said Captain Jacob Smith. "I do him a kindness to sink him with gunfire. We haven't your lawyers or your politicians out here to pitch a slippery tale. If I take Teach alive, my orders from my admiralty are to hang him out of hand. Now do you see?"

Mary Arncliffe stared white-faced.

The fruiter, with weigh lost, and steering-gear jammed, began to chase her tail in slow circles. She was sinking a foot a minute. The savage black and yellow gunners on the Jao Geraes fired into her as fast as they could load their ancient pieces, and she made no retort.

She had relied on her speed and the glare of the sunset to get alongside before she was sunk, and carry the war-ship by boarding in the old Blackbeard style. It was a desperate chance, and—it had failed by just a narrow margin.

Lower and lower the wounded ship settled in the evening sea, and shells still smashed into her. Mary shrank away from Captain Smith.

Here was where his blackness showed. A white man would have—what? Picked up survivors? Yes, but for what? After all, was not shooting them all down the more merciful way of ending it?

The sun snapped out with tropical suddenness as the fruiter sank, and Mary and Captain Smith shivered at the sudden chill. The girl was unashamedly sobbing.

The creole made no comment. He seemed to understand. Probably he was sympathetic. He led her down to his boat, and together they went back to the Jao Geraes.

Captain Jacob Smith showed his guest

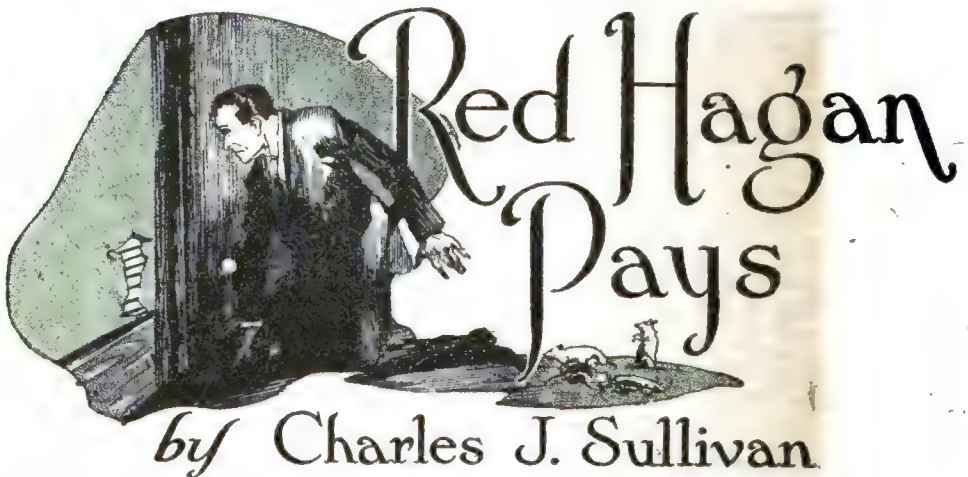
into the gun-house she had chosen, and closed the steel door after her. Thereafter he sent a tray of food. The steward who took it noted next morning when he carried it out that nothing had been touched except the glass of water.

But Mary Arncliffe had not spent that night in hopeless sorrow and despair. An interruption had occurred.

Three hours after she had got back, a banana-skin dropped down on her lap through the sighting-hood. Idly she picked it up to throw it away. Then she saw scratchings on its yellow surface. She held these to the light. She read:

*"Darling:*

*Your tears are the most precious jewels I ever stole. I'll earn you yet. E. T."*



**R**ED HAGAN crawled to the door of the box car, and leaned out. Far ahead he saw the smoky horizon of the city and the tall chimney of the State penitentiary. He shivered, and at the same moment the train slowed down with a jolt. The door slid back suddenly, and Hagan detrained not at all in the manner which he had planned. In truth he hadn't planned to leave the train at that point at all.

For a full minute he lay very still in the bottom of the dry ditch while the freight rattled on into the yards. When he opened his eyes and realized where he was, he scanned the terrain furtively, then scurried into the cornfield along the right of way. Once in the depths of the sea of stalks he paused to listen. The crackle of every dry leaf in the field seemed to rush to where he stood. He stood tense a moment, then his shoulders sagged, his head dropped, and he groaned in self-pity.

He made a ludicrous figure there with his checkered suit, his gabardine-topped shoes, and his rakish fedora. A long, polychro-

matic tie fluttered about his pale face, and his finger nails showed signs of having been polished recently by a professional. A stalk near him cracked, and he jumped as if the noise had been a pistol shot. Then he grinned foolishly and began to brush his clothes. He dusted one knee scrupulously; then sat down in the middle of the row. At every sound his head turned as though it were on a spring, and his hands twitched and fluttered about his face as though they were detached.

"I guess I'm through," he sighed rather tragically, and self-pity moistened his eyes. If Hagan had burned an orphans' asylum he would have pitied himself on the scaffold. "I'd give—" he paused in serious study. "I'd give ten years off my life to have last year's roll again." The leaves and stalks laughed dryly, and Hagan noticed that the day was gone and the sky was growing dark. He arose hastily.

"God, this place would drive me bugs—all right—ugh!" He started to run aimlessly across the rows instead of with them. Everything combined to worry him. Top-

heavy stalks had fallen, and these tripped him every few feet. He lost his hat. The dry leaves cut his hands and face. He turned and ran straight down a row until it seemed to him that he had run for miles. Again he turned across the rows and in a half dozen steps he found himself in an open field, recently cleared.

His spirits rose, and he dropped into a brisk walk. At the end of the field he came to a grove of heavy evergreens. The ground there was clean, only a few shrubs in clusters here and there; but the dense upper foliage was like a high ceiling painted black, and the straight trunks were like a nave.

Hagan thought of the great, forest-like cathedral which he had visited in one of his enforced flights to Europe. And as the thought of the cathedral flashed through the back of his mind he remembered an inscription carved in marble in an ancient language over a statue there. He smiled even now as he recalled the guide's translation:

There is no theft. Men always pay.

Hagan's mind coursed back over the last ten years of fast life—the thousands of dollars which he had stolen and squandered, the easy living following the hunt. He chuckled to himself: "Men always pay—me."

He halted abruptly and stared before him. There was a house looming up unexpectedly in the middle of the grove. It was the kind of a house that makes you shiver when you see through trees at twilight. It was white—not painted—but a pale, ghostly white like driftwood. Hagan knew at once that if it wasn't haunted, it ought to be.

He stood looking at it uncertainly for a moment; then went nearer slowly. With every step he felt something weigh heavier in the pit of his stomach, and the palms of his hands became moist and hot. Yet he was not consciously afraid.

He saw that the house was ancient and deserted. There was a dank, moldy odor pervading the entire vicinity. One or two shutters still rattled lonesomely. The windows looked like a blind man's eyes: dull,

and yet they seemed to see. Hagan thought that he saw a figure pass across one of the lower windows, and though he was sure it was not real he turned aside to go around the house.

Through the trees he could see the lights of hurrying motor cars on the highway beyond the grove, and he knew that he had only to gain that road to find the way into the city and a temporary refuge from those who sought him for old crimes. In front of the house he found an old gravel road that curved up to a rotten portico and then back through the grove to the main road again.

He stepped onto this confidently when suddenly a big touring car roared around a curve ahead of him. It showed no lights, and as it swished past him he saw two pale-faced men straining their eyes into the darkness. He was staring after this car when the bright lights of a second car whirled around the curve in pursuit.

Hagan leaped into the bushes. He knew at once that this second car carried police. As it flashed past him he saw a man lean out over the hood and fire a pistol in the direction of the first car, which had now turned the curve at the house and was speeding toward the highway again.

Hagan lay very still and white among the bushes. He was frightened. Police! Why were they here? Whom were they chasing? Had he stumbled into a hunt? He listened eagerly as the two cars sped down the road, and twice again he heard the crack of the pistol.

Night fell damp and cold. The moon was racing behind a screen of clouds. Hagan got to his feet quietly. He didn't step on the gravel again. Instead, he skirted the bushes back toward the deserted house. He crept onto the rotten porch, pushed open the sagging door, and went in. Very carefully he closed the door behind him.

The rattle of the latch echoed and re-echoed through the empty rooms, and unseen things began to rustle. The moldy air was stirred, and it came down the stairway and across the hall like a gust from a tomb.

Hagan moved down the creaking hallway

until his hands touched another door. He pushed this open and entered what had been the living-room of long ago. The odor of stale tobacco smoke there rather startled him, and he paused. He felt that there was some one in the room. Instinctively he moved away from the door and backed against the wall. He opened his mouth to speak, but his throat was dry and he was trembling so that he dared not risk his voice. He stood quiet, listening.

He could hear the irregular creaking of the stairs, and once the faint rustle of a wet rain-coat or a dress. He tried to speak, but all he said was: "Here," in a hollow, trembling voice. There was no answer. Something pattered hurriedly across the floor; there was a sudden stirring of a newspaper as though some one had been reading in the darkness and had been disturbed; a soft object plumped to the floor close beside him and an angry squeak caused him to jump out into the middle of the room.

With fingers that shook he struck a match and held it above his head. He had forgotten the police now. In the quick flare he saw a rude box-table against the wall, and scattered over the floor were scraps of newspaper and hundreds of cigarette butts. The match went out, leaving him in deeper darkness than before. He searched his pockets fearfully. He found only ninety cents, a scented handkerchief, some cigar bands, a knife, and a pencil. He turned to the table, sprawling on it.

The day had tired him. Things were becoming worse. Last night he had had his hat for a pillow and clean straw for a bed. To-night he had but the hard boards of the table. Once or twice he was startled from his first sleep by the nameless noises of the house, and when he opened his eyes he was frightened by the dancing moon-shadows on the floor.

At midnight Hagan thought that he had been awakened, and then when he awoke he believed that he still dreamed. The light at the window was bright now, and steady. He lay still, watching it. Suddenly he became aware of voices near him—the voices of two men speaking in guarded undertone.

He wondered sleepily if that were the way ghosts talked. He half arose, and gazed all around the room. There was nothing but the patch of soft moonlight on the floor. He lay back, and the hum of the voices lulled him into a half sleep.

Suddenly he felt a clammy hand brush across his face. He jumped into a sitting position on the table, and sat there blinking into the darkness. Then from somewhere in the outside world he heard the low chug of a motor. At first he thought it was a car passing on the highway; then it seemed to be standing nearer, in the grove perhaps.

He started to get down to investigate when he was startled by the glow of an electric light through a large crack in the floor just below where he sat. He gazed down at this strange light like a skipper who sees an uncharted island far at sea. Then he located the low voices, too, as coming from under the floor.

Hagan, thoroughly awake now, slipped noiselessly from the table and crouched on the floor above the crack. The bright light nearly blinded him at first, but what he saw made him gasp; and the saliva dripped from the corners of his mouth. He sat back and wiped his lips on his coat sleeve. He slapped his cheek gently to assure himself that he was awake, then bent down to look again.

Thousands of dollars! Crisp new bills in neat bank-packs, and all squeezed neatly into a long, tin box. Hagan counted the packs. There were twenty, and each one was marked in blue stencil: \$1,000.

"God! What a haul!" gasped Hagan. He saw the grimy hands of a man appear above the box, carrying two more packs of bills. Hagan noted now that the box was setting across a well prepared hole in the ground, and that the hole, too, was lined with new tin that glistened in the light.

"Can't get these in, Bill," a low voice spoke.

"Might need it, anyway," answered another voice. "Let's shake a leg with the box. You know, they're on our trail."

"Yeh." The speaker drawled, but Hagan saw his hands begin to work more quickly. He passed one pack to his part-

ner and the other he slipped into his own pocket. Then the two men covered the box with a close-fitting tin lid. Together the four hands bound the box with tape, and over all they dripped liquid paraffin.

"Sure she'll keep thataway?" asked a voice.

"We could get life, and then leave this to our heirs," chuckled the other. "No worry."

Hagan saw the box lowered reverently into the prepared hole, and the four hands scraped earth on top of it hastily. The sound of the dirt falling on the tin was ghostly, but Hagan was no longer susceptible. He watched every movement of the hands below him with the intentness of a cat watching a mouse. When the hole had been completely filled, the site was covered with a fine white dust to hide the surface.

"All set?" The voice sounded as if it were at Hagan's ear.

"Yeh—let's go."

"Wait—let's shake—neither of us will ever squeal." The voice trembled. The grimy hand just below Hagan hesitated a little, then raised and clasped another. For a full half minute the two hands were all that Hagan could see, and so still was the house that he heard the crack of the men's knuckles in each other's grip.

"Me for you, Bill."

"Me for you, Severy."

"Me for you, Hagan," and he grinned to himself in the darkness.

Suddenly Hagan saw the two hands jerk apart and poise tensely in the air.

"What's that?"

"That's them—sure as hell." The light went out.

Hagan heard the noise of a motor on the gravel road. This time it was close.

"They've got us. Get away from the pile." The voice below him was hoarse.

"Up through the kitchen," said the other.

At first Hagan did not realize his danger. He was thinking only of the wealth in the ground below him. He stood up, and stared down at the floor. Already he was looking into the future, at the easy life again, the idle, spending life which he loved so well.

A sharp command followed by the crack of a pistol awakened Hagan to his position. He rushed to the door. He couldn't afford to be taken with this bunch. At the door he heard footsteps in the hall. He turned and scrambled at the window. A light from close outside flashed into his face, and he staggered back, now really frightened. He cowered under the table like a whipped dog, and lay there waiting.

The room door opened slowly. Hagan hid his face in his arms.

"Don't shoot! Don't shoot!" he cried. There was a moment of silence. Then in the dim moonlight Hagan saw a man back through the doorway dragging another by the shoulders. The latter's feet thumped helplessly on the floor, and he was groaning feebly.

"Where did they get you, Bill?" asked a husky voice.

There was no answer except a deeper groan. "Are you goin', Bill? Eh? Are you goin', pal?" The voice became hard and fierce. Hagan saw the man who was standing draw a gun and jump to the window. The light from close on the outside flashed again, and he fired twice at it. He tried to jump back as the fusillade of shots crashed through the jagged pane. The pistol dropped from his hand and spun across the floor almost at Hagan's feet. Hagan heard the man swear softly—or pray—and he fell in a queer heap in the middle of the room.

The room was very still again—the stillness of death. Hagan reached down and picked up the pistol. The barrel was still hot. The light at the window flashed again, and in its glow Hagan saw a pack of bills on the floor. Without thought except that there was money he crept forward and picked it up.

The door creaked slowly. A light flashed into the inner darkness and centered straight on Hagan.

"Drop the gun, lad. You haven't hit any one yet. Don't make your sentence longer."

The voice was low but firm. Hagan's hand relaxed, and the gun and pack fell to the floor.

Numbed by terror and disappointment



he allowed the officer to drag him to the waiting car. He watched other uniformed men carry the two limp forms from the house and place them carefully in the bottom of the car. There was a hurried examination.

"Take your time, Charley. Both of these have cashed in, and the other ain't hit." The car moved slowly down the roadway. Just around the curve was a dark touring-car with its engine still running.

"Ten years." Hagan actually smiled when the judge pronounced the sentence. At the words "hard labor" he winced a little, but was at once comforted by some inner thought, for he smiled again. The newspapers, the police, and his own council had insisted that his name was Jess Gorsuch, and as Jess Gorsuch, he was tried and sentenced. No one knew that he was Red Hagan, wanted for more than half a dozen robberies.

Only the man whose sentence was now beginning knew the advantage in it to himself—a safe sanctuary for ten years, and at the end of that time two thousand dollars a year for every year of safety. In that time Red Hagan would have ceased to exist. There would be no more hunts. He could collect his ten years' salary and live quietly the rest of his life.

Hagan smiled as he was led from the court-room; smiled on the way to the penitentiary with the tall chimney, and smiled when the big, silent gate swung closed behind him.

In his cell Hagan began to live in the future. He sat over his bench in the shoe-shop, muttering and laughing to himself. He looked upon the other prisoners with contempt.

"Poor devils! Workin' for nothin'. If I was them I'd run a awl into my heart." Then he would chuckle and look down the long line of benches out of the corner of his eye.

Ten years for looking forward to one day! Three thousand six hundred and fifty nights of dreaming of a buried box beneath a haunted house. Late in his first year he smuggled a pencil from the shop

into his cell, and worked a whole night making small blue lines on the wall. He made the full number of three thousand six hundred and fifty lines, one for each day of his sentence; then in the morning he erased three hundred of them with one swipe.

That day he felt good. It seemed that he could already glimpse the end. But that night, when he could erase only one of these tiny blue lines, his heart chilled. He started to count them one by one. Surely he had made too many of them. There were four rows stretching clear across the length of his cell. He counted up to two thousand and then became confused. He was not sure that he had counted correctly. He started at the beginning, and fell asleep before he had counted a thousand.

In the seventh year Hagan's eyes began to gleam with a light that was not of the prison. He was still strong and healthy in every way, but his eyes began to look as if they were not a part of him. They were blue eyes, but sometimes they lost all trace of any color, and were merely spots of glowing light.

When they were that way he could not see and neither could he hear. Guards howled at him, and then rapped his gray head to knock him out of his trance. Often at night he would leap from his bed, hugging his arms to his breast as if he had something hidden there, and would rush across the cell as if he were in an open field. The crash of his head against the iron bars or the stone walls would weaken him, and he would totter back to his bunk and his dreams.

The only moment in Hagan's days or nights that was bright was the fraction of a second it took him to erase a blue line every morning. He would wet his finger and with a swish the mark was gone—the day was erased. But then a bell would clang, the harsh voice of a guard would snarl: "All out," and the long grind of the real day would begin.

Sometimes he would make believe that he had forgotten to erase the line for several days, and then he would have a feast. He would erase sometimes as many as four



of them at one swipe. Often he would really forget how many days he had neglected; then he would worry through a whole night trying to figure out how many lines should be left on the wall.

Sitting at his bench in the shoe shop, at the mess table, in the corridors, he was always mumbling apparently irrelevant phrases:

"To-night—one more and to-morrow's is two." Then some thought would darken his face for a moment. "No! No! No!" he would literally bite the words. "I saw 'em. They put it in tin, and the box was wrapped in tape, and paraffined." Then: "I'll have to go roundabout way—some one might follow me." Three hundred and fifteen—but to-day's and to-morrow's will—"

Then while he still had more than two hundred marks to erase a guard took him before the warden. He was to be released in the morning. When the warden told him that his time had been cut for "fair behavior" he swayed and nearly fell. He felt that he had been cheated. Why had they not notified him long ago? They had deprived him of two hundred and sixty days of anticipation. What was the good of going out in the morning with only one night to look forward to it!

In the morning when the big, silent gate swung closed behind him he did not smile as he had done years before. He laughed, a cracked, rasping laugh, and started to run down the deserted street.

When evening came he had not stopped to eat or rest. He had reached the edge of the city, but he was afraid to proceed. He was panic-stricken. He was being followed.

He started turning every corner he came to; he ran and walked in great irregular circles, the centers of which slowly drifted nearer to the fields. As he ran he looked back over his shoulder. His imagination peopled every stairway, every alley and untenanted place with spies, and from these he dodged as though he were physically threatened.

He doubled his pace, and his imagination doubled the pace of his followers. He darted down an alley. It was blind. He

ran around like a frog in a jar, trying to scale the walls; then in absolute terror he closed his eyes and ran back the way he had come, expecting every moment to be tackled.

Out of the alley, he jumped on a moving street car and was off again within three blocks. He ran into a stairway and stood there quivering. No one entered. He climbed the stairs stealthily, and found a rear exit. He raced across a soapy court, and into the next street.

A big man on the corner laughed at him and pointed him out to a companion. Hagan's legs weakened and he would have fallen, but at the moment he caught a glimpse of the open country at the end of the street.

At dusk he was at the edge of the grove of heavy evergreens. He crept into a clump of bushes, and watched the fields breathlessly. Darkness came and he had seen no living thing anywhere—neither in the wide fields nor in the grove. He waited stoically until the twilight's last gleam had faded, then he carefully examined his flashlight and the big-bladed knife for which he had spent the last of the five dollars given to him by the State. His plans were all made. For ten years he had planned minutely this hour's actions. There could be no hitch.

He smelled the house before he saw it. The dank, moldy odor reminded him of the dreaded basement of the prison. A chill ran down his back. He crawled forward slowly on his hands and knees. Straining his eyes into the darkness, he saw that he had come up in front of the house.

He tiptoed across the gravel road. He had been so sure that the house would be there that he felt no thrill to find it unchanged. The door swung open at his touch, and he went directed to the room where he had been arrested ten years before.

It was like Hagan that as he entered the room he should think only of what had happened to him there, not of the tragedy of the two men whose crimes had left him so rich a legacy.

His light flashed across the room. His

heart ceased to beat as he saw that the old box table had fallen at one end, and that neither newspapers nor cigarette butts littered the floor. Some one had been there. He rushed forward to find the crack through which he had seen the treasure buried.

At first he could not locate it, and his forehead broke into a sweat. His old fingers scratched along the floor like the claws of a crazy crab. He began to puff and wheeze. When his fingers found it at last he cried aloud.

He went to work at once. Placing the light close to the crack he began to whittle at the place until he had made an aperture large enough to allow the light to be wedged into it head down. Then, knowing that the light would point straight down to the buried box, he hurried out of the room.

On the front porch he paused, startled by the weird effect of the moonlight shining through the trees. This wasn't a grove! It was the old, forest-like cathedral of Milan. Again he saw the gray marble statue with its ancient inscription, and the queer translation of the guide:

There is no theft. Men always pay.

Hagan laughed aloud. "Yeh—men always pay," he hurried around the house laughing. Yet there was a fear deep within his heart. Would he find the ground disturbed? He hadn't looked through the crack. Had some one been there before him?

At the point where he saw the light he tore a rotten board from the bottom of the house, and crawled under. When he arrived at the spot where the light pointed, he sprawled there, his hands clutching the dry earth lovingly, and his eyes were

gleaming. He was laughing and jabbering to himself. The ground was unmarked.

He started to dig with his long-bladed knife, and the dirt flew back into his face. After a few minutes the blade struck something solid. There was a dull, metallic sound. How often during the ten years had he heard that telltale sound in his dreams.

The box was still wrapped in tape, and there were still traces of white paraffin hardened into the crevices between the folds. Hagan's thin old fingers trembled so that he had difficulty in cutting the hard bandage, and even when the last strand was cut he could not open the lid, so tightly was it fixed.

At last when he felt the top slip he was frightened. Was this the long-expected moment? He crouched above the box, and his eyes gleamed with an unearthly light. Before him was idle happiness for the rest of his life—wealth, ease and safety. Twice his hands reached out to lift the lid and twice he drew them back. His mouth was dripping and he breathed in gasps.

He lifted the lid. So powerful was his ten-year-old mental picture of what he would see that for nearly a minute he could not realize that what he saw was other than what he had expected.

The bottom of the box was covered with tiny bits of pale green paper that seemed to be alive. The stuff moved and crawled. Hagan moved the box mechanically under the light, and then he saw mixed with the bits of paper hundreds of small ants who were working even on this day when their world was coming to an end.

Hagan tilted the box, and in the corner at the bottom he saw a little hole—a hole about as large as the head of a pin,

## L I F E

BY SENNETT STEPHENS

FROM out of sleep and dreams we wake  
To other dreams, and then  
We each the self-same pathway take  
To sleep and dreams again!

# A PROTEST

BY JOHN KENDRICK BANGS

YES, I greatly love my garden,  
Where the rose is still a rose;  
And I beg nobody's pardon  
When I speak of lily-blows;  
Though no longer, gentle flowers,  
Are your simple names the thing.  
And my neighbor's fragrant bowers  
To strange nomenclatures ring.

I don't mind the "Captain Christy"  
As a flower full and free;  
It is just as sweet and tristy  
As the pink rose used to be;  
But it fills me with derision  
When my Scotch rose from afar  
Flaunts its beauty on my vision  
As a spinosissima.

And perchance I'm rather silly,  
Yet it hurts my feelings some  
When I hear my Japan lily  
Called a lancifolium;  
And the simple, sweet verbena  
Doesn't somehow seem to please,  
When it blooms in the arena  
As a teucრიoides.

Who would know his honeysuckle  
As a periclymenum,  
Or the berry of the huckle  
As a Pennsylvanicum?  
And the Dutchman's pipe—reliance  
Of the lattice popular—  
Now is smothered deep by science  
As a macrophyllia!

I don't mind appendicitis  
As a name for stomach-ache,  
And no doubt for book and treatise  
It is well such terms to fake;  
But for me, when in my bowers  
'Mid my blossoms sweet and shy,  
None shall dub my peeping flowers  
Flora rubberneckii!

# The Misadventure of Manuel

by George K. Cummings

**P**EDRO ALVAREZ was a twisted old man, whose mind was as crooked as his broken back. Avarice lurked in his malevolent black eyes, always searching for a shady trick, or the greedy end of a hard bargain. Through long years of sharp trading he had acquired the ill-will of all his neighbors, and the largest store in the tropic village.

Now, in his old age, the biter was bitten, and all the village laughed because they knew the aged miser had no idea that he was being robbed. During the long, hot mornings he tended store just as complacently as ever, and in the afternoon took his nap comfortably, while Manuel waited on the customers.

It was sleek little Manuel Gomez who was cheating the old man, resting content in his childlike security.

Three months previous Manuel's father had died and left him the vast heritage of three hundred dollars, all in gold, and in the care of Pedro Alvarez, to be held for a year until Manuel was twenty-one.

Immediately Pedro had offered the young heir the sole clerkship in his village store. "Twenty pesos a month did his clerk receive," the old man added impressively.

Manuel simultaneously took the position and a wife. A man of affairs was he now; the salary of a prince and in a year a fortune of the Indies.

How pitiful and small were the prospects and the lives of those boys with whom he used to consort on equal terms!

In the afternoon and evenings he had sole command of this great business. Eight pesos a day, sometimes, he took in over the counter, and on feast days as high as twelve pesos went to the till. Dreams came to him that some day he might perhaps buy the store for himself, that is, if he did not travel in strange countries when he came into his fortune next year.

Then he would look admiringly at the shelves and counter of the native tienda almost as proprietor. Did it not possess the finest stock of goods in the country? Olives from Spain, salt codfish, rice, gondules, maize; even cans of American tomatoes were there. Tins of Danish butter and guava dulce were on the counter, and garlands of dried onions and garlic festooned the rafters.

And of all these he, Manuel, had charge.

After the first novelty had worn off, Manuel began covertly to sample a bit here and a bit there from the goods on the shelves. In this way he insensibly acquired a fastidious taste that was not satisfied by the usual fare to which he had been accustomed from childhood. Then he began thinking: was he not selfish to have all these good things for himself while his little, loving wife, Lolo, could have only peon rations?

It was thus that he started pilfering from the stock, until very soon, each day a little bundle would be made up, and hidden in the closet of the back room to be taken home late at night. It came so easy that it was but a short step for him to take enough more to supply Lola's parents also.

Now all the village was talking and laughing about it; pleased that at last the old hunchback miser was befooled. He, the wise one, the trickster overreached by a mere boy!

The women squatting by the riverbank washing clothes among the scattered boulders exchanged chuckles, and gleeful quips with the sugar-cane cutters sitting in the shade of the banana-grove near by.

"The old fool, he cannot see that which even a lizard would notice!" shouted an aged washerwoman, rubbing a camisa deftly on a rounded stone in the stream.

"His dotage is upon him," averred the woman next to her in line.

A young giant, coal-black, swung his cane knife, shorter and heavier than the usual machete. "Manuel would taste a stroke like that, if only the old man knew, and had still his strength left." He severed a sapling thick as a man's arm with a single stroke of the knife.

"The high air that Manuel carries now, and the money he spends! Mother of God! A prince could do no more. Shrewd and cunning he is. Pedro is no match for him," said a young, trim-figured girl as she passed with finished wash; a white ball balanced on her head.

"A silence on thy chatter. Here comes Manuel now," warned the aged washerwoman.

Along the white road that glared in the tropic sunlight, sauntered a slimly-built young man. Olive skin, straight black hair, rather loose mouth, and eyes close-set, were salient features that the passing glance observed. He stroked a faint mustache with complacency as he ogled the passing young girl.

His attitude and glance betrayed the conscious superiority that a spendthrift and man of large affairs could well afford to assume among admiring inferiors. With his household well provided for through his

nightly stealing from the store Manuel was now throwing away his twenty-dollar-monthly salary with reckless abandon in costly luxuries.

He greeted the girl with a lofty wave of his hand. "*Buen' dia'*, Carla, thy work is early done to-day?"

"*Si, señor*, of a quickness I have been," she replied, noticing with appreciative glance that the buttons on his cotton blouse were of shining, beautiful shell, at medio peso the dozen, instead of the dull bone ones that the others wore, which cost only half a real.

"Stop at my house as you go by, and see the new mantilla I bought for Lola yesterday. Two pesos it cost."

"*Ay di mi!*" cried the admiring girl. "It is wonderful! What a husband you are!"

The young man drew himself up proudly, then raised his hand deprecatingly. "It is nothing. We men must dress our women bravely, no? Of what else use is money?" The downward swing of his hand was eloquent of the disdain in which he held two dollars, almost a week's wage of a lusty field-hand.

"Money to you is as the sands upon the seashore." The girl raised respectful eyes to his.

"It is brains, not dull flesh to which the pesos fly," said the young man, as he strode bombastically down the white road.

When he had got quite beyond hearing the girl muttered: "Santa Maria! If Pedro ever finds thee out, young bantam, thy wings well clipped will be."

Manuel stopped at the group of resting cane-cutters eating their eleven o'clock meal of frijoles and tortillas, washed down with cold coffee.

"You are coming to the dance at my house to-night?" he stated rather than inquired.

The big black nodded eagerly. "We all come. Is it not true that you have hired for the night the witch machine from the capitol? They tell me," he nodded to the women by the riverbank, "that a band of little fairies in it send out music that bewitches the feet to tango, no?"

Manuel drew himself up imposingly. "True it is," he asserted. Then with a

grandiloquent gesture: "When I turn the handle so"—he rotated his hand mysteriously—"and place the black singing-plates in it, the saints themselves could not keep from dancing. I learned how to do it from the alcalde, before I hired the witch machine for a peso just for one evening to entertain you. Now I can control the magic, me!" He tapped himself upon the chest impressively.

A little awed hum went around the circle of listening men. Some one interjected: "Brave one, not to fear the magic!" Another spoke up rather haltingly: "About the drinks, Manuel; shall each man bring his share as usual?"

Manuel remembered the half-dozen bottles of rum that he had thoughtfully abstracted from the store the day before, and answered with surpassing magnanimity: "Nay, friends, that is all provided for. When I invite, I entertain like a caballero."

This time the hum from the circle of men was distinctly approving. The tone of it remained in his ears as Manuel walked toward the village, exalted with pride and gratification at the impression he had created.

As he walked by a little brown boy working in a tobacco-patch that flanked the road leaned on his hoe-handle and gave him grave salutation. Two women sat in the doorway of an adjoining shack, deftly weaving straw hats. The eaves of the thatched roof protruded, affording them shade from the noon-day sun.

The women waved gayly as he passed. The banana-leaves of a near-by grove, ribboned by former high winds, rustled in the slight breeze. His eyes roved past the adjoining meadow, where oxen were browsing on the succulent malajilla grass, toward his own hut where stood his little wife, Lola, waving to him.

"My prince!" she cried adoringly, as Manuel approached, and pleased by the salutation, he allowed himself to be kissed.

That evening the overhead tropic moon, low hung, cast sharp, squatty shadows from the two tall coconut-trees on either side of Manuel's shack. The breeze had gone down with the sun, and through the still-

ness myriad night noises came from an adjacent jungle patch. Cucubano bugs flashed their intermittent lights as they flew from the hibiscus shrubs to the clump of bamboo at the rear of the house.

Inside, the single room of the thatched shack was brilliantly illuminated. Four candles in bamboo sockets flanked the walls, and as if in reckless extravagance two oil-lamps with glass chimneys cast dazzling refulgence over the ball-room. A tiny phonograph held the place of honor, bravely upraising its flared tin horn from the top of an empty soap-box upon which the machine stood.

The guests arrived by twos and threes, with enthusiastic greetings at the preparations that had been made. After his pompous salutations as host, Manuel led each of the arriving guests to the witch machine; impressively ending the awed inspection with: "You shall see later the fairy music issue when I turn the little switch, and command them to play. So sure I am of my power that I have not even practised on it since it arrived an hour ago."

Then he returned to the five-gallon empty oil-can that Lola had that day carefully boiled in potash water. Into it he emptied six bottles of white native rum, and with meticulous care added now and then water or a squeeze of lime, or a pinch of sugar fresh from the centrifugals, that the beverage should be most delectable to fastidious palates.

While the punch was being thus prepared, and Lola was cutting thin slices of stolen cheese to place between purloined soda-crackers; down the road, half a kilometer away, old Pedro Alvarez sat alone on the steps of his dark store. He raised his head, listening, as the soft shuffling of bare feet slowly approached. The aged washer-woman drew nearer down the moonlit road.

"Buena' noche', Don Pedro."

"You go to the baile?" the old miser inquired, with a twisted smile, pointing up the road toward Manuel's house.

"They do not invite us ancients," cackled the old woman.

"Of an age we are," assented Pedro, "but if not to the dance, why walk you at this hour? Of a certainty not for exercise?"

"No, Don Pedro; but thinking of you, and the long years that are past has brought me to my feet this night."

"So?"

"Yes, fifty years have not dimmed the memory of those dances you and I attended." Insensibly the woman had assumed a tone of familiarity as she thought over the distant past.

"So?" the man repeated, shifting uneasily, hoping she would not proceed into interminable reminiscences.

Unperturbed she continued: "Fifty years have I watched you, the wise one, the prudent one. Always besting the bargain, always getting richer and richer; never spending, always hoarding, and now—" She paused solemnly.

"Well?" he grunted.

"And now you are overmatched—beaten—swindled by a youth!"

At last Pedro seemed interested, his eyes turned searchingly upon her. "What mean you?" he asked.

"All the village laughs. Old age has dulled you. A few months more, and all your savings will be gone. Bare will you be, as a child's belly."

"The moon has crazed you, woman!"

"It is you who lack wit, Pedro. Each night Manuel feasts like a king; and also his wife's people dine like royalty. All this food stolen right from under your nose by Manuel! And your senile eyes and doddering brain notice it not. Of a surety is the keen one dull, and the victims of your former trades in the village now chuckle with glee at your downfall."

A simulated pathetic note of appeal tinged the old man's voice: "Does all the village know this shame?" However, his eyes glowed wistfully, as though he was eager that the thing be known, rather than that the bitter truth should remain concealed.

"Of a surety," she replied impatiently.

Pedro laughed aloud. "It is well," he said. "It is as I hoped." Then he grasped the woman's arm. "Come with me a little moment."

He led her through the shade of bread-fruit-trees, whose broad, serrated leaves cast an intricate pattern of black lacework upon

the white sand surrounding the little store. Skirting the maguey cluster whose sharp leaves resembled threatening blades upraised in the silver moonlight, they came to the rear entrance of the building.

Pedro unlocked and flung open the door; struck a match, and pointed to a cupboard door in the rear storeroom. His voice trembled as he spoke to the woman, who stood excited and wondering at his strange actions.

"Each day, Manuel, the shameless one, puts his stolen articles secretly in that little closet. Then, late at night, he comes back and removes them in the dark."

"Ave Maria! You know, then!" she whispered wonderingly.

A look of cunning overspread the miser's face.

"Have I lived all these years in vain?" he hissed. "Do you think a rat may gnaw a cheese, and I not know? Can callow child unnoted remove from my store the treasures of my heart? Each evening, before Manuel returns for the goods, I come in here and count them well. No item is omitted. I do not say I count them twice, but"—a little sigh of ineffable contentment escaped his withered lips—"well, I am satisfied the total is not *too* small. The village laughs, you say? That is good. But not yet have they laughed a hearty laugh. Would you see them double up with mirth? Then come with me."

A moment more the aged couple were hastening down the road toward Manuel's home. As they approached and looked through the open door, Manuel had finished brewing the punch to his satisfaction, and was now about to open the ball by explaining the beauties and the mysteries of the phonograph, which he would command to play for them in a moment. A theatric gesture of his arms as though to conjure the imprisoned spirits was interrupted by the entrance of the aged miser.

Pedro Alvarez advanced across the floor, a genial smile on his usually sinister, malevolent face. His walk was springy, almost mincing, and his hand waved cordial greeting to the host and guests.

Manuel stood startled, wondering.

"Good friends all," Pedro began, "it is

with a pleasure and a gratitude I come to this fiesta to-night. To see you all feasting brings joy to my big heart."

Murmurs of incredulity hummed from the assembled group, and Manuel felt a strange, sinking sensation, totally at variance with the elation that had buoyed him a few moments ago.

From the bent head of the old hunchback a low cackle of mirth issued. "Before we start to dance, however"—he paused, and deep breath, indrawn through many lips, sounded through the room as the listeners braced themselves for the finishing of his remarks—"a little matter of business," Pedro continued, "the business before the pleasure always, no? Well, friends, you know I am always as prompt in my collections as in my payments."

"A hundred times more prompt," cried one of the guests a little braver than the rest. Pedro frowned him into silence with an ugly look, and went on:

"Manuel, here, child of my heart, has been very good to me. Most liberal, I should say. Of all my customers he is the very best. To be sure, he has a special night delivery; but what of that when I check every item, and for this credit I have deposited with me in gold by his father all that I could ask. It has been a beautiful business transaction to me, and now—"

Manuel, in his nervousness, had inadvertently touched the starting switch of the phonograph, and from its horn issued a muffled, confused sound. Pedro stepped forward, and from the throat of the tin horn drew a written scroll of paper. It unfolded as he pulled it out.

"Your witch had an impedient in her throat," he said in explanation. "I stuffed it there as the cart passed me this afternoon."

He handed the long roll of paper, covered with figures, to the surprised Manuel. The unrestrained music of the phonograph echoed through the room.

"Your bill, my son," continued the old man. "The last crackers and cheese, and that rum," he pointed to the six empty bottles on the floor, "just makes it total to two hundred and ninety-nine pesos and three pesetas—at retail prices," he added after a little pause. "I am a just man; hence here is the odd peseta left of your inheritance," he forced the little silver coin into Manuel's hand, and turned to leave. "A good customer," he flung back over his shoulder, "yes, a very good customer—a trifle tricky, perhaps—but then, what matters that when you pay so promptly!"

He raised his hands, and uplifted his eyes as though in benediction, as he passed out of the front door.

## COMPENSATION

BY GRACE G. BOSTWICK

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Then I had never learned to sing;  
If love had jeweled all my ways  
I scarce had known these golden days;  
If grief had never touched my brow,  
I ne'er had been so blessed now.

But life was hard and so I sang;  
With wistful hope each measure rang;  
The lonely days so cruel to bear,  
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And sorrow tried me but to prove  
How sweet the hard-learned lesson—loye!





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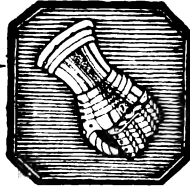
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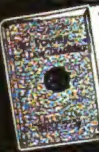
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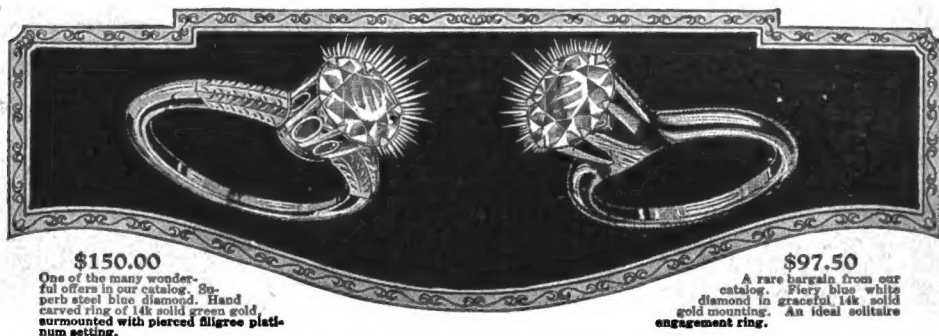
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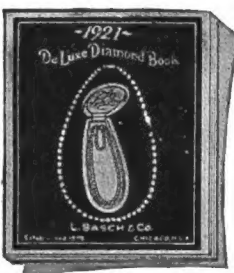


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—a complexion of enchanting pinkness,  
fairly tingling with the inviting health of  
girlhood, rivaled only by the loveliness of the  
bursting Jacqueminot Bud, is yours also from  
the use of

## CARMEN COMPLEXION POWDER

—so popular with charming women because of its  
rare characteristics that blend so perfectly with  
the color and texture of the skin. Such reassuring  
protection in sunshine and wind! So soothing  
and refreshing at all times! You'll like it also  
for the long time it stays on, and its genteel,  
delightful scent.

*White, Pink, Flesh, Cream and Exquisite New Carmen  
Brunette Shade—50c Everywhere*

### Trial Offer

*Carmen Brunette Shade*—The new charming creation is so  
popular we will send you a purse size box containing two  
or three weeks' supply for 12c to pay postage and packing,  
or we will send any other shade you prefer.

**Stafford-Miller Company**  
St. Louis, Mo.

*The Final Touch*

